

# TIME AND ETERNITY

Gilbert Cannan



1<sup>st</sup> ed.

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TIME AND ETERNITY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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NOVELS

PETER HOMUNCULUS  
LITTLE BROTHER  
ROUND THE CORNER  
OLD MOLE  
YOUNG EARNEST  
THREE PRETTY MEN  
MENDEL  
THE STUCCO HOUSE  
PINK ROSES  
MUMMERY  
ANNETTE AND BENNETT  
(*In Preparation.*)

PLAYS

FOUR PLAYS  
EVERYBODY'S HUSBAND

BELLES LETTRES, ESSAYS and

SATIRES

WINDMILLS  
SATIRE  
THE JOY OF THE THEATRE  
FREEDOM  
THE ANATOMY OF SOCIETY  
NOEL  
POEMS  
SAMUEL BUTLER

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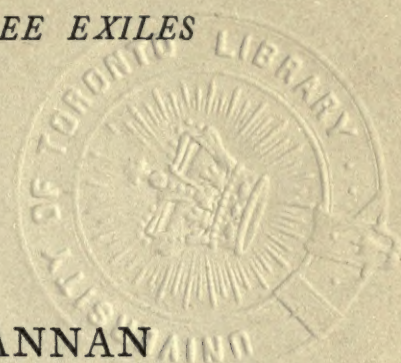
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# TIME AND ETERNITY

A TALE OF THREE EXILES

BY

GILBERT CANNAN



"See where the child of Heaven with wingèd feet  
Runs down the slanted sunlight of the dawn."

*Prometheus Unbound.*

[18<sup>th</sup> edition]

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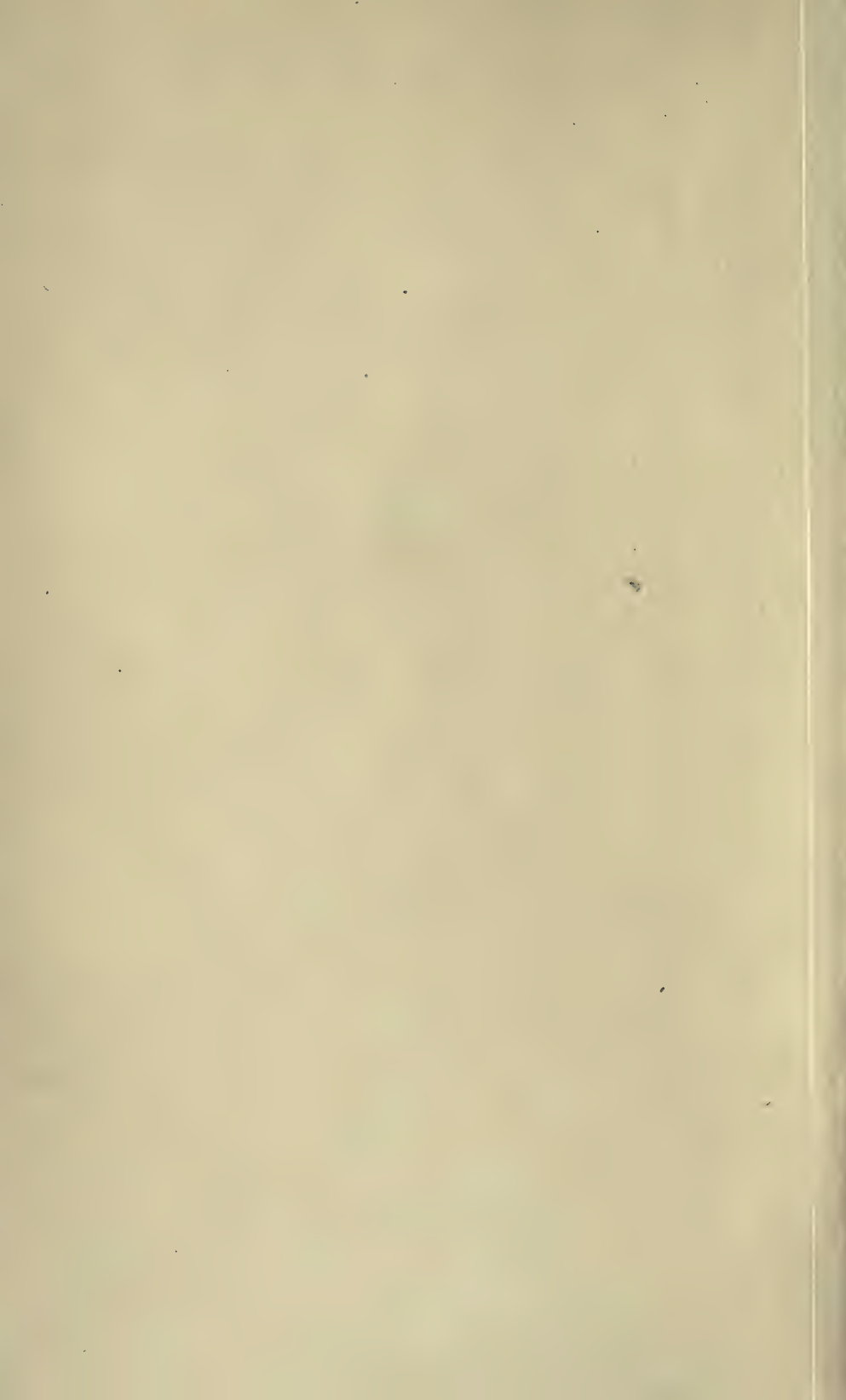


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# TIME AND ETERNITY

## CHAPTER I

### MR. PEREKATOV

MR. PEREKATOV struck a match, burned his fingers, growled, lit another. As he held it in the cup of his huge hairy hands its light revealed a massive Jewish face, a long delicate nose, thick, sensitive lips, a heavy blue chin and tragic, short-sighted eyes. Opening his hands he held the light up to the door and found the number he was seeking—33.

“That’s good!” he said, looking up the dark street, and he knocked on the door.

He heard light footsteps on the stairs, the door was opened and a woman stood in the light of a guttering candle. The hall and stairs were dirty, but the woman was neat in her petticoat and bed-jacket, and Mr. Perekatov guessed at once that she was French. He removed his hat and asked:

“Mr. Stephen Lawrie?”

“I think he is in,” said the woman, and she reached out and knocked on an inner door.

Mr. Perekatov noticed with relief that she was middle-aged, sober and self-possessed. He did

not like women until they were old or had given up all hope of thrusting their way into the world of men, but he looked at the woman almost benevolently because she, too, was a foreigner in this strange land of England. He spoke to her in French with a thick Russian accent, and she answered him in the pretty, bird-like language of Paris.

Presently the inner door was opened a foot or so, and in the aperture appeared a head that in the faint light of the guttering candle seemed luminous, so thin and pale were its cheeks, so brilliant the eyes, so white and drawn the skin on the high forehead from which an untidy shock of brown hair was brushed back. To Mr. Perekatov it seemed that the light that came from this remarkable apparition surrounded himself and the woman, separated them from the common world and drew them into a life of rare sympathy and understanding. The woman quivered to the rare influence and from her round lips fell a whisper :

“ C'est un Saint ! ”

Mr. Perekatov, with an effort, reminded himself that this was just a dirty house in a dirty street in the West End of London, that the Frenchwoman was obviously one who passed from friend to friend, and that he himself was a poor devil of a Russian earning a meagre living by sending such cables as the censorship would allow to a newspaper in Moscow which might at any moment be suppressed ; but he remembered a day at home in the Ukraine when a Pogrom had been muttered



of and in a dark cellar the Jews, his people, had sung the psalms of David. Between that experience and this his life seemed to be empty. He was young again.

He looked at the Frenchwoman and she, too, was young again with Stephen's youth. Mr. Perekatov spoke his name :

"Perekatov."

Mlle. Donnat gave a little gasping cry, and ran away up the foul stairs into the thick darkness of the upper house.

Stephen Lawrie threw the door wide open. He was wearing a tattered dressing-gown and pyjamas that were wrinkled half-way up his shins.

"Come in," he said. "I was afraid the woman would want to come too."

Mr. Perekatov rolled like a big black bear into Stephen's room, which contained a table, a bed, two chairs, a tin coal-box and a shelf full of books which the Russian approached at once—Plato, Spinoza, Shelley, Dante, Anatole France, Fielding, Ibsen.

"That's good," he said.

"I haven't read a word for years," said Stephen. "Not since the war. Please sit down. I'm not used to seeing people. I don't like them. They don't like me. They make me silent, but the more devastating the silence grows, the more eloquent my eyes become."

"Let them go to Hell," said Mr. Perekatov.

"Certainly," replied Stephen, and he knelt by the fire trying to light it, but his efforts were so clumsy that Mr. Perekatov took the business out

of his hands and soon had the kettle boiling and tea made.

"You ought not to live alone," said Mr. Perekatov kindly.

"But I must," said Stephen. "At least I must until I have finished thinking."

"That ends in a stupor," said Mr. Perekatov. "I know. It was only through meeting you that I broke my own."

"When did you meet me?" asked Stephen.

"At a conference. It was a banal affair, but you taught the people more than the speakers."

"I did?"

"For those who had eyes to see. You were sitting in the gallery, above the platform. Through the grey light as the dead words of the speakers wakened living thoughts in your mind your face was a light great enough to illumine all that place. It has taken me six weeks to find you."

"Who told you?" asked Stephen, distressed at this discovery of his self-revelation.

"Chinnery."

Stephen laughed.

"Chinnery," he said, "is the one link with humanity that I have not been able to drop. He is sub-human. Perhaps that is why."

"Please!" said Mr. Perekatov, holding out his case of Russian cigarettes. Stephen accepted, and for a long time they sat in silence smoking. When the case was exhausted Mr. Perekatov produced a packet from his pocket and filled it again. The little cardboard tubes littered the hearth. In the house next door a musician began



to improvise, playing the phrases that pleased him over and over again. Stephen smiled grimly. This performance was a nightly torture to him, but he was astonished to see that it made no impression at all on Mr. Perekatov.

At last Stephen broke the silence by saying :

"There is a synagogue opposite. It is surrounded with motor-car shops. I think that is why I live here. The new and the old."

"What are you waiting for?" asked Mr. Perekatov.

"I don't know. To understand myself, I think. What should I be doing?"

"How do you live?"

"I translate and teach languages."

"Russian?"

"No. I speak no Russian. French, German, a little Italian. I don't think about it. There is enough money without my worrying, and people are kind."

"But you live like myself—like an exile in this Lord Mayor's Show of a country."

"Precisely," said Stephen. "I am not on show." And he thought with a twinge of shame of Mr. Perekatov's description of himself at the conference—which he had attended with Chinnery—attracting attention.

"I am *not* on show, and never will be," he said vehemently. "If I can do nothing without it, then I will do nothing."

"That's good," said Mr. Perekatov, now assured that this was the man he was seeking. "You see," he added, "I am an honest Jew. That is

as rare a thing as an Englishman who is not on show. We are both exiles from our race. That is good. Something may come of us."

Stephen looked down at his own thin hands and wrists and compared them with his friends' huge paws and hairy arms that looked as strong as the branches of a tree, and he thought that his life might have been very different if he had had physical strength to withstand the storms of youth.

"You know," he said, "nothing has ever happened to me. Everything I touched turned into a joke until I could stand it no more. And now I touch nothing: not because I am afraid, but because I know beforehand how it is going to turn out. I am happier—just thinking."

This was not at all what he had meant to say or what he intended to convey, but he was relieved to find that the Russian had understood him. He was encouraged to go on.

"Time," he said, "is just a joke. Nothing serious can happen in time. Bubbles of life come up through it, but they are only bubbles. One lives for the moments when the bubbles break into eternity. . . . I am not used to saying what I think. It is so much clearer unexpressed and so much more communicable. Speech is to silence as time is to eternity."

"Mathematics," grunted Mr. Perckatov. "There is something in Chinnery. When there is no genius, turn to the idiots. Chinnery believes there will be a revolution, and he imagines that you will bring it about."

"I?" laughed Stephen.



"Yes. He told me that you were working in secret and had meetings with anarchists. He is a fool, but he is right. A race must follow its exiles. I have not had an idea for a long time, but when I have an idea I follow it. When I saw your face at the conference, I had the idea: there is the English revolution, quiet, decent, silent, joyous beneath the surface until the people are all living as their exiles have told them to live. I know now why I came to England. . . ."

"This is absurd," said Stephen, beginning to feel tired and not a little bored. "If ever there is a revolution in England it will be because the English laugh their o'd institutions out of existence. And I don't laugh because I live in silence."

"It will be as I say," said Mr. Perekatov. "There must be legendary people. I have been here eight years now and I have found only you."

"I won't," answered Stephen. He got up and paced agitatedly up and down the room. "I'm damned if I do, damned if I let them lie about me, and sentimentalise me, and beslaver me with their filthy inventions. My brother did that once. He wrote a book about me: all my young egoistic love paraded by my fool of a brother to show how superior he was himself. And my fool of a sister is just as bad. Because my brother wrote the book she has a whole series of myths about me: how she brought me up and how I used to confide my childish ambitions to her. I never had any. I never had an ambition except to find a hole like this and watch the bubbles breaking. . . . You know I ran away with a woman, and she ran away

with some one else because she could not stand being happy and because I would not quarrel. That's a great story in my family: an idyll, and to them it is a terrifying horror. And they are terrified of me because of my silence. But they keep me alive: money sometimes, food, clothes. They don't come and see me because this house is not respectable. . . . You saw the woman at the door. There are two more. There is a Russian tailor and a sluttish English family—and myself. But these are the only people who are alive, and I sit here and listen to the music of their lives.”

“There was a house where I lived in Holloway Road when I first came to England. I wore an astrakhan cap and a black cape and the children used to pelt me. In the house lived Joe and Ma and Sissie and the lodger who paid for Sissie's clothes. There was Pa, too, but he was not often there. They were respectable, there was some light in their lives, but they were too still and I was unhappy. So I lived in my office, where there was nothing to hear. I remember one night, a damp, foggy night under a lamp in the Holloway Road, an old woman, terribly old, offered me love for sixpence. I ran until I came home and lay on my bed sweating with horror. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before, and I thought the old woman was England offering me love for sixpence. You know how a thing like that can blot everything else out. I became an automaton, like the other automata in Fleet Street, but I knew in my soul that England was not like that, not like the Lord Mayor's Show



either, and I was glad when I saw England in your face."

Mr. Perekatov stopped, and with a peculiarly Jewish opening of the hands he made obeisance to Stephen, who remembered with a stab of disgust a woman who once in a theatre had taken his hand and kissed it and then slipped away.

Why should he remember that now? He compared that, which had happened when he was very young, with his experience at the conference, and a feeling of revulsion seized him, shook him, left him dazed and sickened. He could understand well enough, only too well. In him, in a crowd, its feelings gathered and grew to an intensity that made him a symbol of its desire, whether he liked it or no, whether or no he was in sympathy with it. He knew now that the woman who had kissed his hand was worshipping the crowd and he thought that Mr. Perekatov was doing the same thing, and he detested it with all the force of his native Puritan hatred of idolatry.

"No, no, no!" he cried. "That is wrong, all wrong: the very thing I am hiding away from. Can't you see how easy it is, just to suck up what they feel until it spills out into—God knows what—hysteria, exaltation, or pure nonsense? Futile! Making men as soft as women and a prey to their fantastic emotions. I won't, I tell you. I won't!"

"Sit down," said Mr. Perekatov sternly. "Sit down."

And Stephen, rather to his own astonishment, obeyed him. Mr. Perekatov wagged a thick finger at him.

"You are afraid," he said. "You are a coward hiding away from yourself. You are like a child. You have never suffered. You are innocent. You have never given yourself to man, woman, or cause. You can reflect, draw up into yourself everything and spill it out again in futility because you have never met any one stronger than yourself until now."

Stephen made a great effort and concentrated his whole power of thought on this surprising defiance, but to his amazement—also, to a certain extent, to his relief, it made no impression whatsoever, and he took refuge in the blank expression of innocence which had served him so well as a child.

"It is a pity," said Mr. Perekatov, "that you have never learned. In my country you would have been in prison as a student, and in prison one learns. But here even your honest men are comfortable."

"I know," said Stephen. "You want to talk about my soul. I have read your novels. I shall do nothing of the kind. You have no privacy and no respect for it. You want everything laid bare in one moment."

"Hold your tongue," said Mr. Perekatov. "You will listen to me."

He half rose and Stephen hoped that he was going, but he squatted again more heavily, took out another little parcel of cigarettes from an inside pocket and went on smoking.

"Do you make your own cigarettes?" asked Stephen by way of creating a diversion, but Mr. Perekatov was not to be put off.



"My first impressions are never wrong," he said. "You are contemptuous because you are tired of waiting and your time has not yet come. Men die and sink into starvation and women go on selling love for sixpence and you can do nothing to stop it, you who will one day turn the stream of life back into its course."

"Look here!" said Stephen, leaning forward and clenching his fists. "Look here! I would rather you came here and told me dirty stories than sat there forcing this mystical stuff on me. It is far more indecent: a thousand times as indecent to expose the soul before it is ready, or—or willing, or—or before it burns its way out in a flame that will not be denied."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Perekatov, and again with his hands he made that maddening gesture of obeisance.

"Damn it all," shouted Stephen. "You're a Jew, just a Jew looking for the Messiah. I tell you I'm the product, the miserable product of British education, scholarships, examinations, Cambridge and all that, a poor goose stuffed until my liver is put out of action. If you want to know the real rock-bottom fact, my liver is rotten and so I can't stand my fellow-men."

"English!" said Mr. Perekatov with a slight sneer. "Very English: ashamed of reality, taking refuge behind the concrete."

From the mews next door there came the roar and clatter of a car going out on its day's rounds. Six o'clock!

"If you don't mind," said Stephen, a little

feebly, "I would like to go to bed—I'm not used to this all-night business."

"In Russia," said Mr. Perekatov, "when we discover the light in each other we stay awake until it has gone. We do not leave go of each other until all is revealed."

"What an appalling prospect!" said Stephen. "Do you mean that I am not to shake you off until you have exorcised the evil spirit that you pretend to have found in me? I never meet a Jew without feeling that I am back in the Old Testament."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Perekatov enthusiastically. "That is because you are alive to the spirit of race. It speaks, it lives in you. The spirit of your own race can salute that of every other. You can make men conscious."

That, Stephen knew, was the fatal truth, and he put aside the thought growing in him that the Russian was crazed with solitude and exile. It had always been his uncomfortable gift to make people aware of themselves, even critical, and they had hated him for it; ducked him in the fountain at St. Botolph's; forced him in later life out of any work he had ever attempted to do. . . . There was some comfort in having it baldly stated like that, but the habit of solitude was strong upon him and he resented even this friendly intrusion.

Unfortunately for him the habit of discussion was strong upon Mr. Perekatov, and he was just beginning to warm up. It was nearly seven in the morning. The piano-player had ceased long ago. Occasionally there was the sound of a motor-car



or a cart in the mews, but such sounds as could be heard were lost in the stillness of the dawn. It was very cold. The slow breaking of the new day overpowered everything, the waking life of the great city, and the now rather hectic thoughts in Stephen's brain which at last surrendered and left him simply receptive. Only Mr. Perekatov was not overpowered, and his voice seemed to gain in depth as he spoke out of the stillness of the dawn. The birds in the cages in the mews twittered now and then, but were silent again as though, like Stephen, they surrendered to Mr. Perekatov. Hearing them Stephen thought that he was very like one of them, caught and kept in a cage to comfort poor captive human beings whose only knowledge of freedom was a dim aching memory. It was a woman who kept the birds, linnets and bullfinches, and it was a woman who had shut him up in solitude: no actual woman, but the ideal whom he had sought and had not found. The song of his heart was for her, but she never came to hear him and so he sat waiting, unable to move because no one else could hear his song. It trembled in him now and he ached with longing that Mr. Perekatov should hear it, but the Russian had no care for delicate and subtle things. He was all for definition, and his whole effort was directed towards fixing the quality that he had divined in this young Englishman. It seemed that if necessary he would stay until he had achieved his object, and his next manœuvre was to talk about himself. Stephen knew at once that this was designed to draw him

out and he retired into his shell, but, exhausted as he was, he could not help listening to the Russian's story with a warm interest not unmixed with a certain salt of envy.

## §

"I WAS born," said Mr. Perekatov, "in a village in South Russia—miles, hundreds of miles from a town or from anything Russian. You can imagine, then, how far away I was from anything European; or perhaps you cannot imagine."

"I can," said Stephen. He could not look at his friend whose solemnity made him want to laugh. Every third sentence or so Mr. Perekatov brushed his tongue along his upper lip, and his hands moved slightly as though they were itching to knead his story into shape.

"It was a Jewish village and my people were big people in it. I was a terrible fighter, but not so bad as my brother, who would fight until he was nearly dead. Yes. We had to fight. . . . When quite young it came to me that I must learn Russian. There was no Russian spoken among us, no Russian book was allowed. I learned with a dictionary, and then I began to teach Russian. The most tragic business. It was as though I had gone straight to Hell, but it was a passion with me: I was passionate then. To have books: that was my passion. I was young then and thought all could be done at once, and did not know that I must have Latin and French and English books. I did not know



that there was a University. When I heard of this I must go. But how to get the money? I starved for two months until I was nearly dead. I understood then that a man must have books as he must have bread."

Stephen drew in his breath with a sharp hissing sound. Mr. Perekatov lit another cigarette.

"So I went to Kiev and forgot that I was a Jew, and became a Russian. It is a beautiful town, Kiev. What I had wished to do for the Jews must be done for Russia. I made many speeches. I have a big voice, and soon there was trouble. Until it was quiet again I learned Latin and French, and understood that there was more than Russia to think of and that I had been a fool to imagine I could reform my stinking little village. All the same, life was very bad in Russia—1905. All that made what I had been saying look very young and foolish. The Revolution failed. We should have been men; we were talkers, but the bureaucrats are fools and fear talkers more than men. To avoid arrest I had to leave Kiev for a time and returned to my village. There my brother, who is not a talker, had started a school to teach the ideas that I had introduced, and that school was being attacked. It came to blows. The people of the old school broke into ours and we fought it out with fists and sticks. When my brother fights he cannot stop until some one is dead, but soon the others had had enough. They left us alone and we had our school. . . . But I could not stay. There was so much to learn. I felt that I had to learn for all

my people. As soon as I could I went to Kiev again, but now I was not a revolutionary. The Revolution would come? Let it. All that matters so little. I learned some Greek and began to understand, but I had not lived at all. I had not suffered."

Stephen began to wish to protest that Mr. Perekatov should tell him no more, but he could not open his lips. Ideas were beginning to stir in him for which he could find no words. He was terribly uncomfortable; his body was exhausted, but his mind was on fire, and so he only said in a very faint voice :

" Yes."

" I fell in love," continued Mr. Perekatov, " and I forgot Greece, Rome, Russia, and my village. And I was in love for two years."

Stephen understood that Mr. Perekatov in love was a very formidable proposition, and again he could only say in a faint voice :

" Yes."

" I did nothing else," said Mr. Perekatov. " We were students. We lived together. It could not go on always like that. It is understandable, but when it came to an end, everything came to an end. Finished with Russia. . . . I came to England. I don't know why. I stayed. I don't know why. . . . Ah! but you should be in the Russian forest in the spring and in the summer, when you can go away for days and sleep out under the trees. I miss that in England, the smell of the earth in the people, but I stay. I don't know why. Nothing to do. They tell me



lies which I am to send to Russia for my paper. I do not send them because if you cannot tell the truth it is easier and better to say nothing."

That was near enough to Stephen's own technique of life to excite him, and he rose and walked restlessly about the room.

"Thank you," he said. "It would have been so easy for you to lie to me. Most people do. I should have believed you. I generally do, if I'm at all interested."

"I do not lie," grunted Mr. Perekatov. "There is something so innocent, so happy about you as about all the English. Perhaps that is why I stay."

"I liked best," said Stephen, speaking rather like a child, "the part about the school, and all that about going out of your village to Rome and Greece. That is what one really lives in, isn't it? Sitting here in a room like this one lives far more than scratching among the other cocks and hens. . . . You won't mind my saying this, but I—I didn't like the love part."

"It hurt you," said Mr. Perekatov.

"Oh, no, no!"

"It hurt you. I enjoyed doing it. You will drown in your eternity if you do not learn to swim."

"I hope you'll stay to breakfast," said Stephen, steering away from discussion of himself. He had divined that this was the art of polite conversation as practised in Russia, and his shyness forbade the laying bare his entrails as surely as his sincerity prohibited his indulging in the English art whose method is prevarication.

The interchange between himself and the Russian was deeper than their words, and he felt that he had the advantage in understanding, and he was not in the mood to let it slip as out of kindness he had so often done. He was certain that he disliked this facile Russian frankness that blurted out intimate facts without waiting for the growth of any intimacy to make them palatable, but at the same time he liked the disturbance in his existence that it produced. It is very pleasant when you have found a formula for yourself to wake up one fine day to find that it is no longer applicable, and as this pleasure warmed Stephen up he said :

“ I’m sure I could.”

“ Could what ? ”

“ I’m sure I could love like that.”

Mr. Perekatov frowned. He was pained, for Stephen was defying him. When Mr. Perekatov made up his mind about a person he expected that person to conform to his ideas, and Mr. Perekatov was certain that the English had civilised their passions almost out of existence.

“ That was in Russia,” he said.

“ I am inclined to think,” answered Stephen, with a chuckle, “ that London is as big as Russia, if not bigger.”

But humour was lost on Mr. Perekatov. It neither pained nor pleased him, but merely did not penetrate to his selective intelligence. He took off his glasses, produced a large white handkerchief and polished them while he peered through them up at Stephen :

"A cholera!" he growled. "You must first grow a beard. Love is for the young things, and you are neither young nor old, and just what you are."

"What's that?"

"A walking idealism. Something that ought to be in the race, but is rejected by it. Somehow the spirit has gone out of England, though perhaps it is never there, but always lives in just a few men. But the race is good—old, and used to things, and knows what life is and does not bother about it; lets itself be swindled and laughs at the charlatans so that none of them can go on swindling for long. Thank God it has no ideas. In Russia everybody has ideas and nothing else, the lazy dogs. A man will run about after women like a dog and make ideas about it. . . ."

With great precision Mr. Perekatov spat on the little pile of cigarette tubes in the hearth.

Stephen said:

"So I'm not a man, eh?"

"An Englishman, doing his job without making a fuss about it."

On that Stephen winced. Mr. Perekatov had understood more than he had bargained for.

"Yes. You may write books or make speeches, or be a little clerk in an office. What does it matter? Whatever it is, you will be a little Saint Francis of Oxford Street."

Stephen was inclined to protest. He had no more ambition for sainthood than for any other distinction, but Mr. Perekatov had sown the seeds of doubt in his own mind. He did not know



himself very well, and was shaken into more self-realisation than he was accustomed to. For instance, though he was nearly six feet in height, supple and strong, he was in the habit of regarding himself as small and frail, and, anxious to take up as little room in the world as possible—because as a spectacle the world was so beautiful—he was unaware of many of the powers of spirit and mind to which Mr. Perekatov was now appealing. He felt that the Russian was anxious to clinch the matter and to produce a dramatic conclusion to the interview. If Stephen could have been personally interested that might have been possible, but, being without hope or fear, his one desire was for ecstasy, and when that was not forthcoming he was content contemplatively to wait. He smiled as he thought how utterly unintelligible that must be to Mr. Perekatov pursuing definition, and then he was distressed when the sweetness of his smile evoked from the Jew that involuntary obeisance.

It was a relief when there came a tap at the door, and opening it Stephen found Mlle. Donnat, who, as she often did, had fetched his milk with her own from the dairy a few yards up the street. She started when she saw Mr. Perekatov and could not help saying :

“ Ah ! Méchant ! You 'ave not been to bed ! ”

“ No,” said Stephen. “ An all-night sitting.”

“ Please,” said Mlle. Donnat. “ You must be tired. Let me make the breakfast.”

It was the first time she had conversed with Stephen, though not the first time that she had

been in his room, which, when he went out leaving the door unlocked, she had often cleaned.

There was no gainsaying her and in a few moments she had lit the fire, made coffee, cooked bacon and eggs and had the two men munching in grateful silence; and while they ate she swept up the hearth and the floor and burned the cigarette tubes, which showed to her distressed intelligence the nature of the night's doings.

"For seven years I have been in London," said Mr. Perekatov, "and no one has made breakfast for *me*."

"Oh! La, la," piped Mlle. Donnat in her bird-like voice. "Then M'sieu has not used his eyes."

She was elated and happy, and when she had finished she went upstairs and they could hear her singing in her room as she made her own breakfast.

"I am sorry," said Stephen. "I did not want contact with humanity—not for a long time. I wanted to get on with my work."

"Who is stopping you?"

"My own affections," replied Stephen, suddenly contemplative, gazing out through his window at the synagogue without seeing it.

It was a clear October day. The year's fruitfulness was ending with a magnificence that far outdid that of its beginning in the fitfulness of the English spring. The whole impetus of the ripening seasons was behind it, and it was emphasised by the mockery of the unanimity with which men and women had turned away from it to lay waste

and destroy and to hurry youth into the grave. He realised then for the first time how completely he was cut off by his inability to share the emotions that in their panic urged men and women on in the dreadful activities of the war. Now he was no longer alone. Mr. Perekatov had no part in those emotions either.

A new life had begun, *the* new life for which he had been waiting and for which he had rebelled against the old. He was nettled, too, for if he had any conceit it was his pride that he could always feel intuitively what was coming, and this had come without warning just when he was beginning to imagine that perhaps generations must pass before others could feel as he did, and for this reason he had lived through dreadful months when life had lost all colour and charm even as a spectacle, and he had been able to see only with his eyes and without vision, months when the bourgeois rules of his commonplace upbringing had seemed necessary unless a man were to live entirely alone. And because he could not admit the necessity of those rules and excessive precautions he had lived alone.

He wanted to speak of his work, but he could not. It was finished, done with, had been of value to himself alone and would never take form as he had once imagined that it must. He must live. The world would not pay for its thinking, and besides, he did not want to go on thinking any more. At the same time the translating work by which he had kept himself alive now filled him with disgust.



A handful of Jewish children came out of the synagogue. Beautiful little creatures they were: vital, eager, robust and none of them were, like the English children of the district, marked with the meanness of mean streets.

He felt that Mr. Perekatov was watching him narrowly and he blushed and came out of his reverie, and he made an observation that surprised himself:

"We have never had the courage of our youth." And then explained: "I was thinking of those children."

Mr. Perekatov turned and looked out of the window also.

"The little blighters!" he said, his stern face almost relaxing. "May they eat pork till the fat runs down their chins. To-day I have to see important persons, terribly important, at the Foreign Office, and some of your nice, quiet English revolutionaries, who do not know how different the Russians are from themselves. May I wash and shave?"

The washing and shaving of Mr. Perekatov was a serious matter. He retired into Stephen's little bedroom that was too damp for sleeping, and presently there came from it such a blowing, snorting, roaring, and cursing as might be made by a whole platoon of soldiers, and when Mr. Perekatov emerged he said solemnly:

"My beard has conquered both your razors. . . . And women dare to complain of their disabilities!"

He huddled on his coat; took his hat and stick, and crushed Stephen's thin hand in his hairy paw.

“Good-bye,” he said. “It is a rule of mine that I eat alone, but for you there are other rules that I will break. You have the worst Press in Europe. I have to spend most of my day studying it.”

“I never see the newspapers,” said Stephen. “I pick up what is happening from what I overhear in the shops and streets. Good-bye.”

Mr. Perekatov seemed reluctant to go. He hovered in the doorway and at last produced a card bearing his name, address, and the title of his Moscow paper.

“I will come again,” he said. “And some day if you will come I will make tea for you. But no women.”

It flashed across Stephen’s mind that Mr. Perekatov assumed an attachment between himself and Mlle. Donnât, who was no longer young, and the idea horrified him, but he could do nothing to correct it.

Mr. Perekatov rolled away and stumped off round the corner into the busy streets beyond the synagogue, and Stephen stood for a moment looking after him. . . . What a strange visitation! And how like London to throw up an exotic figure to break in upon the seclusion sought by a romantic for whom the romance of life was so fascinating as to be intolerable! What a strange mixture of intellectual force and barbarism! And what a pleasant interruption of the discreet organised and civilised life of London that even the war could not profoundly disturb!

Stephen looked with approval up and down his

slummy street and saw it clearly as he had not done for many months : a shabby street, one side consisting of elegant houses long since abandoned to the poor by the class for whom they were built, the other of tall blocks of flats, a modern stone building disfigured with irrelevant sculpture, the grey synagogue with its semi-Oriental windows, a few dull shops; a grey street, a drab street, a channel through which little life flowed. And the names on the shops were of a kind to appeal to Dickens : bizarre inhuman names that must belong to oddities. . . . Of the people who passed two out of every three were foreigners : Jews, Belgians, Russians, Letts, Poles, and in the market streets near-by they all had their shops for their own kinds of bread and meat and delicacies ; not at all the kind of world for which Stephen had been so carefully trained—in so far as he could be trained—not at all the existence that anything or any one had led him to expect to find in England, and he laughed as he thought of the tradition of his childhood that everything outside the respectable humdrum English household did not really exist. And as he had discarded that tradition his relations and friends had tried to make him feel that he did not really exist either, until at last he had almost begun to agree with them.

But on this October morning there was no doubt about his existence. He had lived in that street until he had become a part of it, of its varied, violent, strongly savoured life, in which men lived out of a desire for life and not at all for the sake of what they might appear to be to other men.



For him that morning the whole street was a place of worship, and his faith needed no other assurance.

## §

Mlle. DONNAT believed in striking while the iron was hot, and when Stephen returned from his contemplation she was in his room washing up the breakfast things. He stared at her sorrowfully, thinking of what he imagined Mr. Perekatov had assumed.

"Aren't you going to your work, Made-moiselle?" asked Stephen.

"It is my own little shop. It opens when I go to him," she replied. "I am too happy to-day."

"Why are you happy?"

"Because you have a friend. I think often, '*Pauvre petit*, he has no friend, no one,' and I could not understand how an Englishman could be alone."

"Very good of you," said Stephen. "But you have often done things for me before. I never thanked you."

"I had a friend once who was a *poète*—in Paris. He was like you. I made cakes for him and coffee. He used to eat and drink, but never thought where they came from. He was very like you, M'sieu."

"What happened to him?"

"He married and was rich and no longer was a *poète*."

"And you?"

"I came to England with my friend. Yes.

A Roumanian. Rich. He will not believe when I say——”

She stopped short and would not complete her sentence. Stephen began rather to dislike her and her triumphant air of having taken possession of himself. To cover up what she had been going to say she began to chatter.

“In my country they say that the Russians are all mad. So much trouble for nothing. Trouble, trouble, trouble. ‘Oh! life, why are you hurting me?’ They want life to hurt them more than any one else. I know. We had many of them.”

“And if life is pleasant?” asked Stephen, rather grateful for this light on Mr. Perekatov.

“Then it is a grievance. It is their most sacred of sacred egoism.”

“What were you going to say just now?”

“I was going to say that—— No. It does not matter.”

She looked up at Stephen with delight in her eyes and suddenly to his horror she took his hand, kissed it and ran away.

Raging, he took hat and stick and raced out of the house, out of the street into London, which he had ironically declared to be larger than Russia. He felt that it was true as he walked through the historic thoroughfares, under the yellowing trees in the park and by the river. . . .

When he returned late at night, having had lunch at tea-time and forgetting dinner altogether, he was in love.

## §

It happened through Chinnery of all people. Through Chinnery !

She said that the Boers would be the first to rebel against Commercial Imperialism, and Stephen agreed that the Boers would be the first to rebel against Commercial Imperialism. She said that the English were too vulgar and too provincial to achieve anything further in political evolution, and Stephen agreed that the English were too vulgar and too provincial to achieve anything further in political evolution. She said that the English had overreached themselves in South Africa and Stephen agreed.

As a matter of fact he could not hear a word of what she said. He could only hear her voice, and that he heard rather with the recesses of his being than with his ears. It did not please him, it possessed him. Its low gentle tones released by perfect articulation sank into him and became a warm, golden flood that crept below his skin, and so overmastered him with delicious pain that at times he could hardly breathe. And so overpowering was her voice that he could hardly see her, knew not whether her eyes were blue, grey, green, or brown, whether her hair was dark or fair, whether she was young or old : but he was certain that she was beautiful and that she was somehow golden, as a pomegranate is, or a nectarine, or a pineapple, or a lioness, or an ostrich egg, or desert sand, or any other bird, beast, or thing that is



steeped in the hot sun. Stephen was dazzled with her gold, drunk with the music of her voice. He left her without knowing her name, and, being congenitally disinterested, neither thought nor made any effort to see her again. Who or what she was he neither knew nor cared. She was; and everything that he had believed and striven for was confirmed. It seemed to him that people were only going about their business—the war *inter alia*—because they were not yet aware of the profound change that had come about in them.

Life had for so long been a spectacle to him that he was entirely unaware of the fact that he had been drawn in to play his part in it.

## §

HE met Chinnery in Charing Cross Road. Chinnery was everything in general and nothing for very long. He had so many talents that he expected every one of them in turn to bring him fame and fortune, and at present he was a propagandist. An educated man in London had to be either that or a temporary Civil Servant; and it was easier, if you were a propagandist, to get your name in the papers. Chinnery, like the good modern Londoner he was, had perceived that ideals, like everything else, must be advertised or there is no making a living out of them. There was just a chance that ideals might become popular, and so Chinnery dabbled in them. Failing that he had his eye on the cinema: a weak and rather watery eye set in a pallid face which bulged

beneath a narrow, bald forehead that annexed a considerable shiny space of Chinnery's head, and to persuade himself that this space was really forehead he put his hat on where the hair began. This gave him a rather Jesuitical appearance and he looked like an escaped seminarist, especially when he wore a long black mackintosh almost down to the worn, shabby heels of his boots.

Not suspecting what his action would lead to, Stephen stopped when Chinnery addressed him.

"Wonderful day!" said Stephen.

"I want you to have tea with me," said Chinnery, and he led Stephen back to a bookshop famous for another encounter.

Stephen, as it happened, was the very man for Chinnery's purpose, for his courage had failed him. In the bookshop his astute eye had seen *the* cinema star of the future, a young lady whose name he had gathered was Miss Valerie du Toit. (What a name for the screen!) Miss du Toit occasionally came to the bookshop alone, and then she looked neither to the right nor to the left, but purchased what books she required, ordered them to be sent, and flew out of the shop with the very perfection of motion, more, thought Chinnery, like a person on the films than a real flesh-and-blood young woman.

It has to be mentioned that Chinnery's ideal theories included Free Love, which also he was prepared to advertise if necessary.

Sometimes Miss du Toit came in with an incongruous companion whom Chinnery recognised as belonging to his own world, whose habits and

morals were those of sparrows. This companion was a sturdy young woman from Yorkshire, endowed by nature with that golden hair which is usually only obtained with peroxide, and by the exigencies of her profession with a tinted complexion and darkened eyelashes. Chinnery tried to accost her in the comradely manner of his trade, but she saw in him the kind of man who borrows five shillings on Friday night and was frigid.

She had rebuffed him for the third time just before he met Stephen Lawrie, sauntering in his distinguished aloof way, and obviously unaware of his surroundings. Chinnery was of those who believe that there is always a ram in the thicket, and at once determined to use Stephen as a stalking-horse. His success was immediate.

Miss du Toit was separate from her companion, who was fretfully turning over the books she had no intention of reading. Chinnery stumbled on the threshold to attract her attention. She looked up and saw Stephen, and, as Chinnery well knew, Stephen had a face that compelled attention. Before her eyes could move away Chinnery had slipped in, his hat was off, his bald head bowed and he was murmuring :

“ I want to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Lawrie.”

Stephen bowed and doffed his hat. Miss Atwell—for that was her name—ran her eyes over him and sent a message of two words to her brain :

“ Gentleman. Money.”

And the trick was done. In a few moments more, before Stephen knew what had happened,



Chinnery was walking down Charing Cross Road with Miss du Toit, and Stephen and Miss Atwell were following as best they could.

"Do you like London?" said Miss Atwell. Stephen did not reply, and, as he walked, heard questions and remarks coming up in a steady flow. "I'm an actress. Not legitimate now. Have you heard of Chung Ling Long? It's a Chinese act. I do the singing turn in it. I shouldn't be on the stage but for my stepmother."

Stephen was thinking what amazing things could happen to a man in London if only he let himself sink into it. He could blow through different worlds like the wind across the stars.

"Your friend walks very gracefully," he said at last.

"Oh! she's some kid, I tell you," replied Miss Atwell, her voice a little harsh with jealousy.

At the door of a subterranean tea-room Chinnery had stopped to make sure that the others would follow. As soon as he saw Stephen and Miss Atwell emerge from the throng he disappeared.

"You're a College boy, aren't you?" said Miss Atwell.

"I'm over thirty," said Stephen.

"College boys go on being boys," persisted Miss Atwell, with something like a wink. She had only just got her job with Chung Ling Long and did not believe that it would last. Her wink very nearly did for Stephen, who would have bolted, but that the restaurant reminded him that he had eaten nothing all day.

"I like a good time myself," said Miss Atwell,

setting her sails for the entry into the restaurant, a place all crimson carpet, mirrors, gilt and synco-pated music.

Chinnery was at a table with Miss du Toit, sitting next to her. Stephen and Miss Atwell sat opposite. Valerie du Toit, regardless of Chinnery's feelings, said :

“ I thought you were never coming.”

At once both Chinnery and Miss Atwell ceased to exist for Stephen. He sat concentrated on the strange girl, spoke when she expected him to speak, and, because he was hungry, ate everything within reach regardless of the reproachful eyes of Miss Atwell, who also was hungry.

So the meal went on. They were near the band, but, though its music was deafening, Stephen heard it not. Valerie was talking to him as no one had ever talked, and very soon he was talking occasionally to her as he had talked to no one else in the world. He ate all the bread and butter and all the cakes, and Chinnery dared not order more because he had no money, and was not certain if Stephen had any either. Stephen never thought of it, or of anything. He was rapt in contemplation of a beauty that enfolded him, penetrated him, healed, soothed, comforted, warmed, vivified, rejuvenated him and swept him back into a condition of innocence where he could neither think nor understand, but only worship and be thankful.

How it had all come about he did not know. He accepted that Valerie and her friend were friends of Chinnery's, and he could not bear the idea of walking through the streets again with

Miss Atwell, and in a fearful confusion made his excuses and was about to go when Chinnery followed him for a yard or two and stopped him to say in a low voice :

“I say, Lawrie. Would you mind lending me ten bob for a taxi? She lives at Richmond.”

She lives at Richmond! Divine by association became the river-side! Stephen would have emptied his pockets, his head, his very existence, if necessary to be of the smallest service to Valerie. He produced the ten shillings.

Chinnery's long hand crooked round it and transferred it to his pocket.

“Thanks, old man!” he said. “So long.”

Stephen went away with the words: “She lives at Richmond” ringing rather in his heart than in his head. They were some slight assurance that her feet had touched earth, far more than her presence, which made all life seem ethereal.

“Some eater, your friend!” said Miss Atwell, as Chinnery returned to the table. Being sure of paying for it, he ordered more bread and butter and cakes.

## §

MISS ATWELL would have been even more disgusted if she could have seen Stephen go straight from the tea-table to his Italian restaurant to eat the lunch which he had forgotten. He was hungry; it seemed like the hunger of years, a conscious hunger that gloated over the food and would not be satisfied, and he enjoyed his hunger and its



insatiability; enjoyed, too, the Italian atmosphere of the place that filled his thoughts with Rome and especially with Verona, the first stopping-place under the Italian sky on his youthful flight from British sentimentalism. . . . He had not known then that in London there was no need to fly further than round the corner whither the sentimentalists could never follow. He had not realised that in London a man who had sought spiritual exile could translate it into actuality in any one of thousands of streets. A man could be as completely lost in London as in the Sahara, could starve and die as easily. Had there not been times of illness when but for Mlle. Donnat he would have starved? . . .

He had come to earth with a crash. The shock of his meeting with the golden girl had dazed him and he could only eat and drink (indifferent Chianti), and wonder if the long-headed Italian was always there, always eating *tagliatelli*, and how many *zabaglioni* a man could eat before his brain turned to whipped custard. If every man was his own Hamlet, he was no less his own Falstaff. . . . A good idea that, he must tell it to Mr. Perekatov; but he did not want to tell it or anything else to Mr. Perekatov.

Out of his confused thoughts came very clearly a memory of his childhood. It happened at the first school he attended.

One day, after paying no attention whatsoever to what had been going on, he left his class-room to find his companions drawn up into two lines, one very long, one very short. He did not in the

least know why, but joined the short line, telling himself that whatever they were going to do would be soon over, and with them was marched away to the head-master's room where a dreadful scene was enacted. One after another the boys were birched, and, so astonished was Stephen Lawrie, that he took his thrashing without protest and even without declaring his innocence.

Had not something of the same sort happened now? What was he to Chinnery or Chinnery to him?

Exile makes strange companionships, and Stephen, hardened to exile, accepted Chinnery and Chinnery's prescriptive right to Miss du Toit and to send him walking through the streets with that impossible Miss Atwell. Only——

But Stephen would not admit the thought of Miss du Toit and put Chinnery as a screen between himself and it. The effort of doing so put an end to his Falstaffian mood, and he returned home telling himself that he would work.

When he reached his room, however, he found that his work—the great effort of thought which was to be his contribution to the rehabilitation of the world, since he did not agree with the bloody way chosen and accepted by his contemporaries—had vanished. The symbol over which he had crouched for many months, following out with its aid the deepest processes of life that he could perceive—following Bergson, while discarding his pseudo-scientific language—the symbol was just a circle with two diameters. There had been times when it had flamed before his eyes, but now it

was only ink on paper. . . . And there was his diary, that long egoistic chronicle in which, seeking to reveal, he had betrayed himself. That, too, was ashen to his taste.

There were three yellow-bound French books waiting for translation. They had only meant bread and butter to him, but now they seemed important; they stood for the only direct service he had succeeded in inducing his fellows to accept from him. Not that he had tried very hard: he had not; he had drifted and the work had come his way through a poor wretch, even poorer than himself, who was in a publisher's office. . . . That and the grudging doles from his family were his livelihood. He had justified himself by the immense effort he had made over his work, the symbol, the diary, exploration into humanity that would one day be turned to account if not by himself then by another.

He thought of himself taking his thrashing as a dream-ridden little boy, and he laughed and knew that he would never be very different. The forms that life took were always disproportionately ugly compared with the beauty of the impulses that created them. That beauty he was always seeking, and it was not at all astonishing that those who were content with imperfect forms should find him intolerable; women especially, who wanted to be to him what they thought he thought they were, and detested his habit of putting himself in their place and giving them understanding when they wanted admiration.

He sat by his table turning over the paper he



had covered so assiduously with words and signs that no longer had any meaning. The musician next door was in a light-hearted mood and was playing Carnival; through the house every now and then rang the thud of the pressing-irons of the Russian tailor on the top floor.

The door opened and Mlle. Donnat appeared with a fully prepared dinner on a tray, and Stephen realised that she now regarded him as her protégé. How right he had been to deny her admittance, her or any other woman! She would not be content until she had satisfied her curiosity about him; and her curiosity, as with all women, was largely physical.

"I've had dinner," he said.

Her face fell. She was most carefully dressed and her hair was arranged as for some great ceremony. She stood in the doorway with her tray, a partridge, some pastry, a bottle of wine. The light of the candle in the lobby shone behind her hair and in some extraordinary fashion she had put on beauty. Her lips twitched and her eyes besought him to desist from his cruelty.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I'm sorry. It is amazingly kind of you. I'm not—I'm not what you think. Really, I'm not; I mean—I mean I'm not helpless. I—I live like this because I like it, or—or I used to think I did. It was necessary somehow. I had tea and then I had lunch. What am I saying? It really is tremendously good of you, and I—I couldn't eat all that; really I couldn't . . ."

He was suddenly full of pity for her, this woman

who was no longer young in a world suddenly flooded with youth, and he went to her and took the tray from her while she followed him piteously with her eyes, not moving.

"It was what he used to like, my friend in Paris," she said. "He was like you."

He laid the tray on the table, brought up a chair for her, fetched a plate, and made her eat. But she would touch nothing until half the partridge was on his own plate.

"He was so like you," she said. "I knew nothing of life except through him. I did not expect it to last. It was too beautiful to last. This morning it was as though it had come again. He, too, had a friend, a Russian, and they used to talk all night, and always the days after they had talked were wonderful."

She drank her wine as though it were a sacrament, holding the glass in both hands, and when she laid it down fixing her eyes on Stephen, who made an effort to stare her down, but failed dismally.

"This woman is here for ever," he said to himself, as he tried to stir up indignation at the interruption of his work. But this, too, was in vain. His work had vanished, perhaps for ever, and he could not be indignant. Time enough for reducing life to symbols when he had lived and had found firm ground beneath his feet.

To his surprise, he had found no difficulty in eating the partridge, and it gave him great pleasure to see Mlle. Donnat take up its leg in her fingers and tear at it with her teeth. He was glad she

was not an Englishwoman, though he knew that had she been one it would not have happened and she could not have cooked so well.

"I'm glad you came," he said. "I don't see why we should live separately, as though we always walked about with four walls round us. You have made a mess of life, and so have I. But then, so has everybody. We are all in exile. That is why I cut myself off—to be openly what everybody is secretly. I had to find that out. Now that I have done so I can let—things—rip!"

Mlle. Donnat began to laugh, and she laughed until the hysteria that was in her took complete possession of her, and then she wept. And when she had dried her eyes she sat on Stephen's bed and made him sit by her side, and held his hand in hers.

"It is not enough," she said, "a shop, and business and a backing for business. *Le petit épargne*. You are so like him, my *poète* in Paris, and when he went away he was a *poète* no longer. Just we two. It was life, and everything outside of a stupidity! Incredible! I saw his name in the paper since the war: something for France, but he could never do for France what he did for me. Believe me!"

"I believe you," said Stephen, wishing she would let go his hand. He objected strongly to being dragged back into her past. A woman had done that with him before, and he had become sorry for her. He was not at all sorry for Mlle. Donnat, but he was interested in her. There was an actuality about her that he had not hitherto found



in any woman. Indeed, in his solitude he had begun to think of women as rather fungoid and parasitic. His knowledge of them was extensive, but cold and analytical. They had always done what he expected them to do, but now he began to think that this might be because he had not expected more.

Mlle. Donnat smiled and he was alarmed, but he need not have been. Her idea of love was definite and precise, and had nothing at all to do with looking after a man. It was more closely connected with business. She knew that if she had not been so greedy for her *poète's* love he would not so soon have wearied.

She sighed again.

"I want," she said, "to make you breakfast every day and dinner every night except Wednesdays and Saturdays, when I—cannot. It is not good to work the head when the stomach is empty."

Stephen wanted to explain that he was not going to work the head any more, but for the life of him he could not break in upon Mlle. Donnat's pleasure with explanations. Besides, he was not at all clear as to what he was going to do. That would settle itself in good time, and not so very long either, because, now that his life had begun to move, it would gather momentum quickly. That he knew.

It was good no longer to be cut off from people who had lived, even though he must be sorry for them, as they could not go with him, whose turn had come at last. And it was good no longer to be asking Why? and seeking How? but to accept.

Therefore he was willing to indulge Mlle. Donnat's every desire.

"Now," she said, "you will work easily. I will not disturb you if I stay. If I am alone upstairs I cannot help looking at the synagogue and thinking of all the Jews I have known."

She shrugged.

"Mr. Perekatov is a Jew," said Stephen.

"Ah! But a Russian Jew. So was the one I knew in Paris. I hated him."

"You must not hate Mr. Perekatov," protested Stephen; and again she shrugged.

He guessed that she was expecting him to work, to give her the pleasure of slipping back into the happy time of her youth; and, not to disappoint her, took pen and paper and set to work on one of his three books—a French doctor's account of work in war hospitals, and the patient suffering of wounded men, to whom pain gave a clear knowledge of why they were suffering—and for the first time the devastation of the civilised world became for Stephen a matter of flesh and blood.

Yet he could not write. For him there was nothing whatever to be said about the war. If people could not feel the war's pity and terror, no words could make them. They would cling to words to escape thought and feeling, as they had done for so long. They should be given no words, none whatever, only silence. If there was ever to be joy again in the world silence would assuredly be its herald. . . . Was it not, indeed, this very silence that men were striving to break with their murderous engines, their howitzers, their field-guns,

their mortars, machine-guns and tanks? But there was no breaking it. Only love could do that.

For a moment he was filled with an impulse to write verses, but he thought of Keats and Shelley aflame with a chivalry that the baseness of the world they lived in forced into hysteria. . . . Somehow Mlle. Donnat's presence made him understand that: the strange ecstasy in her, and he knew that until the silence was broken there could be no verses written, and he fell to drawing caricatures of Chinnery, of whom he thought in order not to think of the girl with that deep, stirring voice. Then he wrote two words: Time—Eternity several times, and he knew that love could not be contained in Time.

Behind him he could hear Mlle. Donnat weeping for very happiness, and he understood her perfectly: the woman who had had no child, for whom, therefore, a sensitive man was more than any child could ever have been, aching for him, whose spirit was too great for his flesh, to live in hers. . . . This was the thing that, with all the passion of his intellect, he had sought: to know how life could be, as it should be, shared.

Here in his room, where for so long he had been solitary, sharing was taking place, unsought, unbidden, by two people who, because it had happened, could not but understand.

"The beginning," thought Stephen. "The beginning only. It does not end here."

And as he thought so the communication between them snapped. He turned and asked:

"Did you know what I was thinking?"



“ No.”

Of course not. How stupid of him ! Her knowledge of him had been deeper than thought, as his had been of her, and deeper, far deeper than sex, so that there could never be any question of that. At last he found the expression for it, the sharing of silence ; he knew that for a little while words between them must be empty.

With a start he remembered Mr. Perekatov's words : “ You can make men conscious.” And he resented them, for they seemed to imply volition. He was sure that there was a thing that was happening everywhere without volition, making nonsense of old habits, beliefs and cherished traditions, and very, very slowly restoring power and magic to the spoken word that in time should be holy enough to break the silence. . . . “ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was of God.” . . . The frozen religious teaching of his childhood began to thaw into torrents of life-giving truth, and for a second or two he was happy, as he had never dreamed happiness could be. . . .

“ Couronnés de thym et de marjolaine,  
Les elfes joyeux dansent sur la plaine.”

Mlle. Donnat began to recite the verses she had learned in her childhood, and for her now, for the first time, the verses were pure song. When she had finished she said :

“ Il aurait mieux fait que cela.”

And Stephen knew that she meant her young lover in Paris, and he wondered how much he had to do with what had happened, and how much

was due to Mr. Perekatov, the journalist who would not tell lies; and then he was irritated with himself for attempting to account for it, because everything could be understood. How simple it was! How idiotic to go ransacking the brain, the world, books, art, the passions and emotions! These were only the tools with which the soul worked. How idiotic to worship the tools for the skill without which they were useless; and yet, how marvellous had been the fortitude of the generations who had lived in that idiotic blindness, the worshippers of words! . . . No, decidedly he could not continue to translate French books at eight shillings per thousand words!

With a twinkle in his eye as he thought of the enormous quantity of food he had eaten, he said:

"I shall be starving soon."

"Some one will buy your poems," she said.

He smiled.

"Oh, no. I do not write poems. The work I have done will never be paid for, because it will never be written. I must find work."

"Oh, no, M'sieu. I am saving all the time."

"That won't do."

"But if you look for work they will ask why you are not in France."

"I don't know why I am not, except that I couldn't go. I don't believe in it."

Mlle. Donnat did not question the sincerity of that. Anything that threatened to take him away from her was now evil. She could not question anything that he did.

## §

THE next morning Chinnery arrived to breakfast. He was in the same shabby hat, rusty black mackintosh and worn boots, and looked as though he had not been to bed. Stephen, contemplating him, wondered where and how he lived, a problem which he had never cogitated before. All the other men he knew had professions, wives, incomes, but Chinnery was unaccountable. He had borrowed ten shillings; perhaps he borrowed other things. Certainly he looked as if his existence did not altogether belong to him. He sauntered into the room, looked round for a cigarette, and, finding none, produced one from his own pocket.

"You don't mind my dropping in?" he said.

"Not at all," replied Stephen.

"Brought you a pamphlet that I've written. Ought to go, if I can only get a publisher to take it. Settles all the sex-problem."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Just makes people see how silly it is to be jealous. Women do as they like. Pair off, split, pair again. Why be unhappy? I'm happy."

"Are you?"

"Perfectly. No home, no money, no work. Do a little something when I feel like it. Why can't everybody do the same?"

Mlle. Donnat brought in breakfast for two. She had intended to eat hers with Stephen, but seeing Chinnery, she laid down the tray and withdrew.

Chinnery had inspected her minutely and with



approval. French! He concluded that Stephen Lawrie was a man after his own heart: one who knew how to make others make him comfortable. Also he was reassured.

Over breakfast he said:

"By the way, you've never thought of the films, have you?"

"Can't say I have," replied Stephen.

"You've got just the face for it. You don't mind my saying so? It's all sex."

"Hardly my job, then," said Stephen, suddenly feeling a strange affection for the queer little man gulping down eggs, bread, margarine and coffee, and chattering away with an earnestness that would pass almost anywhere for serious intelligence. Like turning on a tap, Chinnery changed his tone and said:

"I'm an idealist myself."

"A chameleon," thought Stephen.

"Yes," repeated Chinnery, "an idealist. That's what I am, only I haven't the face for it, like you. Properly handled, the cinema might save the world, educate the public."

"The only education," said Stephen, "is contact with educated people."

Chinnery failed to grasp that, and he floundered.

"Beauty!" he bleated. "Bring beauty into people's lives."

He was trying hard to be sincere, so hard that the sweat stood out on his brow.

"What I mean is that I don't see why the cinema should be left to the duds of the stage and the motor trade, and—and if you've got an

appearance I don't see why the world shouldn't have the benefit of it."

"So I have an appearance?" smiled Stephen.

"Well, people look twice at you. It all depends if you photograph well; I'm sure you would. In fact, I have a proposition to make to you. There's a girl. In fact, you met her yesterday. I can't see her with any ordinary cinema man. You know, the men *are* the weakness, aren't they? . . ."

Stephen began to tremble with an unaccountable rage. So this was all that Chinnery could see in that girl: a pretty face to be yearned over by bored, idle crowds. Already he could hear the remarks: "O-oh! Isn't she sweet?" "Isn't she too dinkie?"

Chinnery did not know how near he was to being thrown out by the scruff of his neck. But Stephen was aghast at the violence of the feeling that filled him. Hitherto he had only thought of the girl, when he thought of her at all, as somehow part of Chinnery, and now Chinnery had stepped aside and she was revealed.

"I could get you an offer," said Chinnery. "Three, four or five pounds a day, and, if you make good, of course, almost anything."

"Almost anything," repeated Stephen mechanically; and, to avoid thinking of the girl, he fell in with the little man's proposition.

"Her friend's an actress," chattered Chinnery. "The one you were with. I expect she's just gone on the stage, too."

"You lie!" shouted Stephen in such a loud voice that Chinnery jumped.

"I don't know," he said apologetically. "Lots of Colonial girls come over to go on the stage. I should say she's only just come. Got that freshness."

Stephen could not bear to hear her discussed. To turn the conversation he said:

"I haven't any clothes; I couldn't oil my hair."

"That doesn't matter. It's you just as you are that I want. I'll write scenarios for you. The poverty-stricken genius. You know: the Shelley touch. That's my idea. A genius doing what Shelley tried to do and pulling it off. . . . Don't you think that's great? Preaching to great crowds, awakening them, teaching them; perhaps, as it's the cinema, doing a miracle or two."

Chinnery was getting tremendously excited.

"He'd be crucified."

"My God!" cried the little man. "That's an idea! A crucifixion on Hampstead Heath! A modern Passion! A trial! . . ."

"No, no," said Stephen.

"There's no end to what you could do. I mean, think of having poetry thrown on the screen instead of the tosh they use now. You could do a whole series of the lives of the poets. You could be drowned like Shelley, die in Greece like Byron, swim the Hellespont. They can do almost anything down in Cornwall. You could do Dante, with Valerie as Beatrice. . . ."

Valerie! So that was her name! Stephen caught his breath.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I am within



ten pounds of starvation, and I don't want to work."

"Oh, this is quite hard work, I assure you."

"Is it?" Stephen smiled.

Chinnery was ecstatic.

"It's that smile of yours," he said. "There won't be a woman in the country who won't spend her shilling a week on it."

So enthusiastic was Chinnery that he was quite unaware of having betrayed his true mentality, and he had altogether forgotten his rôle of propagandist. Remembering, he said:

"After all, if *we* don't collar the cinema the other people will, and they'll go on with war stuff, and strong, silent men, and big business, and bluff and crook plays. We've got to strike the religious note. I'm awfully glad you agree with me. I'll run along now and fix you up. . . . Oh, by the way, I promised Miss du Toit I'd take you to tea. She's just moved into a new flat, and wants us to be her first guests. I think she liked you."

Stephen was again seized with a desire to shake Chinnery until his teeth rattled, but he forbore.

"I said Friday. To-day's Wednesday. That gives her a day to get straight. I'll tell her Friday. So long! I'll fix you up with the picture people to-morrow. By Jove, you have given me some ideas! I'm going along to Valerie now. I'll tell her you'll come."

Stephen could not refuse. His one desire was to place himself between the girl and this chatterer,

this sparrow of the London streets. If, as Chinnery said, she had only just come to London, what could she know of it? And how and where and when could she have fallen in with the other woman?

“So long!” said Chinnery. “Thanks, awfully, for breakfast.”

And he sauntered out.

“My God!” said Stephen. “And life began the night before last with Mr. Perekatov! I can’t keep pace with it.”

If this was Time, he thought, no wonder people longed for Eternity and pitched their hopes beyond the grave. He could not but admire Chinnery’s dexterity: his slippery, eel-like quickness, and the ease with which he bluffed himself into different states of mind. Such a man must surely be successful! Why, then, was he so poor that he was homeless and had to pick up his meals where he could?

It was not in Stephen to be suspicious, and he could not imagine that he might be useful to Chinnery, or that Chinnery could have any ulterior motive in view. Stephen had a very wide theoretic but no practical knowledge of human nature. Never having lived by his wits, he did not really believe that any one else did so. When he was brought to starvation he waited until some one gave him food, because he believed in the goodness of human nature, and, in fact, his belief had in the past been justified by experience. He thought it very good of Chinnery to offer him a job as a film actor, and was inclined to think that there

was much to be said for displaying the lives of the poets on the screen.

Three, four, five pounds a week! That was unimagined wealth. . . . He had given up expecting to earn money, because it had never interested him, as it had no power to give him the contemplative ecstasy for which, with its occasional illumination, he had hitherto lived. But now it seemed to him desirable. Without it he was paralysed and could do nothing, and it seemed to him rather shameful that he had never been able to understand it or to sympathise with the energy that others spent in pursuit of it. In his old life, when he had money he spent it, and when it was exhausted sat still until more came.

When he looked back on it he was irritated by the docility with which he had accepted what the world chose to do with his material existence, and the amiability with which he had fallen in with the suggestions of others. But he had never wanted anything for himself. It had been enough to be alive, looking on, only aware of himself as a thing that got between him and the spectacle of life, and every now and then distorted his vision of it. Even now he resented his desire for activity, and more than half suspected that he was simply falling in with suggestions made more or less subconsciously by Mr. Perekatov, who had shocked him out of his normal condition by being so foreign, so completely exotic and barbaric in the stagnant life of civilised England, organised for money-making and for war as an incident in the process. . . . Or perhaps, perhaps, self-exiled, he



had had to wait until he met another exile before he could understand his own condition.

So sudden had been the change in his existence that, after Chinnery's departure, he was filled with an acute nostalgia for the old solitude, and sat still all day, trying to persuade himself that nothing was altered: but in vain. He had entered upon his maturity, and the disabilities of youth had been swept away.

### §

MR. PEREKATOV loved his country. It had produced Dostoievsky, Tolstoi and Tschekov. He loved England because of the part her literature had played in the evolution of his three great men, who were closer and dearer to him than any one whom he had ever met in the flesh. Because of them he could live alone, and preferred it, as giving him freedom to be ready for the next piece of real work that should come his way. He did not plague his mind, as Stephen Lawrie did, with questions and problems on the progress of the war. He had a definite conception of the ideal state, worked out from every angle, and knew that humanity would be long in approaching it, and was therefore unconcerned with the theories, already a generation old, which his revolutionary compatriots presented to the untutored English as novelties.

He lived alone in a derelict, furnished house, ate alone, because he regarded feeding as his private affair, and only saw such people as were necessitated by his business. In the morning he

rose early, read the papers, cooked his own breakfast, cleaned the house, shaved, and only went out when he had a definite object in view. This happened about three times a week. For the rest, he made cigarettes, smoked them, and pondered. On the day after his visit to Stephen he heard that his paper had been suppressed. He reckoned up his savings, estimated how long he could make them last, drew up a dietary chart, and set about making more cigarettes. He had been ruined before, and was not greatly concerned, but rather accepted it as an intimation that he had come to the end of a phase.

He thought a great deal of Stephen, and the astonishment of finding an Englishman who, like himself, lived alone. He knew that it was the hardest thing in the world for an Englishman to do, so easy was life in the ordered island community, where the milk arrived every morning, and the dogs were cared for more jealously even than children: and he was convinced that in the phase of his career that was just beginning Stephen would play a part. He was in no hurry, and was intent upon discrediting his emotions in advance, for never again would he waste himself upon a personal devotion. If Mr. Perekatov had wished for a motto it should have been *communitas aut nihil*.

For a time he thought that the best thing to do would be to introduce Stephen to a circle of Russians, but he decided against that as an infringement of liberty. Of the two it was Stephen who was the more likely to be the first to shake

off the paralysis of solitude and to find a direction in which to move. So Mr. Perekatov left it to Stephen, and was not disappointed.

After a few days of vain struggling to resume life where it had been interrupted, Stephen began to expect Mr. Perekatov to return for another night's talk *à la Russe*, and when he did not come could wait no longer and early one morning sought the Russian out. Mr. Perekatov came to the door in trousers and vest and with his chin lathered.

He caught Stephen up in a bear's hug, led him into his room, gave him a paper to read, and went on shaving.

It was a bare, shabby room looking on to a bare, shabby London garden in which were two plane-trees and an elder-bush. Beyond the garden was a slum in which crowds of children were playing, while a dog with a ball in his mouth ran up and down pathetically, waiting for some one to chase him : but no one did.

"And the men have gone out to defend their slum," said Stephen.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Perekatov. "It is better than living in it."

"I have been so happy since you came," murmured Stephen.

Mr. Perekatov growled inarticulately; then, after he had wiped off the lather, he remarked rather fiercely :

"You are very childish. You want everybody to be like yourself. If you are happy every one must smile. If you are wretched every one must weep. Did you come here to make me happy?"



"No," protested Stephen, "no. I came because I was unhappy: couldn't settle down, couldn't think."

"If you were a Russian you would get drunk."

"I think I am a little drunk. You are like strong drink to me; and life, now that I've squared up to it, seems very raw and powerful."

Mr. Perekatov shouted with laughter:

"Squared up! Squared up!"

"Yes," said Stephen. "I'm ready for anything." And he told Mr. Perekatov about his visit from Chinnery. Mr. Perekatov simply did not listen, and Stephen's words trickled away into silence until at last he looked out of the window again to see the children still playing and the dog still running up and down with the ball in his mouth and no one paying any attention to him, and it all seemed to Stephen to be quintessentially London—children playing in a slum, repeated indefinitely. Whatever happened and however it was dressed, however disguised, the scene, the activity was the same, and nothing could alter it.

"You know," he said, "I don't care a damn what people do so long as they do it thoroughly."

"Exactly," grunted Mr. Perekatov, who sat down heavily opposite Stephen, and began to talk about Russian literature with an overwhelming enthusiasm that soon had Stephen, who knew nothing about it, floundering badly. Mr. Perekatov talked of the characters in *The Possessed* as though they were actual personages whom it was necessary for him to attempt to understand.

At last, after the stream of talk had flowed for

half an hour or more, Stephen pulled himself together and said :

“ I wanted to ask you if—if you ever hear from your people.”

Mr. Perekatov looked through him as a big Newfoundland looks through an impertinent terrier.

“ My people,” he said, “ live in the Ukraine. The Austrian army has been over it, the Russian army has been over it, and there has been the Revolution. My people are Jews. How should I hear from them ? ”

His voice was perfectly toneless, so that there was no telling what he felt or whether he felt anything. He was like a man in whom tragedy is so fixed that he may not seek any relief or turn in any other direction.

“ My family,” said Stephen, fully aware that the remark sounded idiotic, “ is respectable.”

But Mr. Perekatov understood him. There was no difference between being wiped out and being spiritually gutted by the war. The tragedy of England was no less than that of Russia. The two men were very close together just then.

“ If my people were alive I should have heard from them,” said Mr. Perekatov. “ Always they wrote, if it was only a postcard. And I am sending postcards almost every day.”

Again Stephen looked out of the window, and he could not reconcile Mr. Perekatov with what he saw. He could not imagine his friend playing in a slum or anywhere else, though he would almost certainly take notice of a dog that claimed his attention. He was not and could not be part

of the human scene in London. Words, thoughts, deeds, all had for him too deep a significance to allow him to share in the superficial activities of every day, and it was clear why, as a journalist, he must tell the truth or nothing. In all his adoration of Dostoevsky, and his chuckling delight in Anatole France and the devotees of civilisation, how massively Jewish he was, how prophetic in appearance and utterance, how insensible to charm ! He hurt Stephen terribly at every moment by brushing aside as worthless the subtle tenderness with which he approached life. To him the important thing was not an attitude to life, but the living of it, and Stephen began to realise painfully, as Mr. Perekatov talked, that he had achieved nothing but a series of attitudes, and had been only a spectator.

All through the day they sat, now talking and arguing fiercely, now looking out of the window. In the evening they went out and bought liver sausage, Bismarck herrings and white wine, which they brought home to find a number of Russians sitting on the steps of the shabby house, talking. They also had brought food and wine, and they made some ceremony of eating. Men and women, they were all rudely and harshly vital, and Stephen shrank away from them into a corner while they talked. He understood not a word, but every now and then they deferred to him, spoke in French, or asked him in English what he thought of such and such a politician. But, like a good Englishman, he took no interest in politics, and regarded politicians as slightly inferior in importance to



actors. It puzzled him to hear them talking of men whose names were in the papers as though they could influence events. He was astonished when a large-breasted Jewess turned to him and said :

“ You know, we are beginning to feel at home in England. The officials are just the same as they were at home, and there are even more of them.”

At that Stephen laughed. He did not know why, but he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. He had heard that men whom he had known at Cambridge had been put in prison, but he had never till now followed out the process by which they arrived there, and in a flash it became clear to him. He was living under a political tyranny, like that of the Star Chamber, or the Council of Ten at Venice, or the Inquisition in Spain, things that he had always believed to be comfortably tucked away in history. No wonder life had become very queer ! No wonder what he had seen out of the window had seemed somehow fixed and immutable ! No wonder everybody was playing a game, even these Russians, with the exception of Mr. Perekatov. They, too, were like children playing, not in the least suspecting what was awaiting them, or, indeed, what was going on in the world, and they were delighted to play, in England, the old game that they had played in Russia, dodging and worrying the officials. They looked as though they had woken up from a long sleep, as though in England they had closed their eyes and lethalsed their senses until familiar sounds broke on their ears.

For no reason he began to think of Chinnery, and was, after a time, convinced that all these people knew the propagandist. So strong did this feeling become that after a time he could not help mentioning the name to the Jewess. She gave a cackle and shouted in English :

“ Do we know Chinnery ? Everybody knows Chinnery ! ” And she explained how Chinnery had played a part in a futile defence of the right of asylum.

“ Why ? ” asked Stephen.

“ It was in the papers,” said the Jewess, producing a cigar and lighting it.

She seemed to grow as the night went on. Her face became larger, her eyes smaller, and they narrowed into slits through which she eyed Stephen's pale, handsome face as she led the conversation, which became more intense, more personal, until at last every one in turn was making a confession. It was something like a Salvation Army meeting, and presently there was created something of the same unifying presence. The Russians began to sweat and to breathe heavily, and through the smoke-laden atmosphere Mr. Perekatov looked very remote. Obviously he was playing no part in whatever was toward. That comforted Stephen, who did not like it. The Jewess grew larger and larger, and at last she broke into a tirade, while the other Russians grunted, ejaculated, spat. Not a word of what she said could Stephen understand, but he was aware of a collective excitement to which he was a stranger, and he knew that it was detestable, a

kind of debauch. The Russians sweated and grunted while the Jewess gesticulated.

Suddenly it was all over. The various members of the circle sank back into their individuality again. Tea was made and cigarettes were passed round, and soon the party broke up. Everybody looked pleased except Mr. Perekatov, who never took his eyes off Stephen, who stayed after the others had gone. He was terribly pale, lean and hungry.

"I don't like it," he said.

Mr. Perekatov looked distressed.

"It was all about nothing," added Stephen.

"It was about Russia," said Mr. Perekatov.

"Then Russia is nothing," replied Stephen irritably, and Mr. Perekatov shrugged in despair.

"I mean it," continued Stephen, thinking aloud rather than talking. "I mean it. I have seen the Salvation Army do that and preachers in Wales. It is like bubbles bursting in mud. It is, I think, physical vitality escaping without being passed through the mind."

"It is Russia," said Mr. Perekatov obstinately.

"It may be," answered Stephen, "but you have a long way to go before you understand our civilisation enough to upset it."

Mr. Perekatov became a black cloud of gloom.

"It is real," he insisted.

"Nine-tenths false," said Stephen.

Mr. Perekatov opened his mouth and roared:

"Only because you were there."

That cut Stephen to the quick, because he knew that he had the unfortunate effect on people of



making them fake thoughts and feelings alien to their usual habits, but to-night he felt sure of himself as he had not done for years, and he said :

“ I am sure of it. They were unconscious of me. They excluded me. The Jewish woman did it on purpose to keep me out.”

Mr. Perekatov started, and then leaned forward with his involuntary gesture of obeisance.

“ Englishman ! ” he said, and he went on repeating, “ Englishman ! Englishman ! Englishman ! ”

Stephen laughed happily, and said :

“ I am in love.”

He had had no intention of making a confidant of Mr. Perekatov, but the words came tumbling out before he was aware of them. Mr. Perekatov gave an angry grunt of disapproval. He wanted to adore his Englishman, and his worship was interrupted by this sudden intrusion of a woman. He made a wry face as though he had a bad taste in his mouth. Once again he said :

“ Englishman ! ” and then, with venomous bitterness, added :

“ Sentimentalist ! ”

“ I deny that ! ” cried Stephen hotly, being flicked on the one spot in which his vanity was engaged. “ I deny that ! I have fought against sentimentalism all my life.”

“ A man becomes that against which he fights,” said Mr. Perekatov.

“ We are at cross-purposes,” said Stephen. “ Involuntarily I divulged what I hardly knew myself. I must ask you to respect it. Whatever

I have been, I assure you there is no fight in me now. Her name——”

“Go on!” said Mr. Perekatov. “And she is beautiful and innocent, and an angel of whom you are unworthy. I know, it is all in *Tom Jones*—Sophia Western.”

“I beg your pardon,” chuckled Stephen good-humouredly. “Nothing of the kind. Are you entirely unable to distinguish between literature and life?”

“Why cannot you English keep quiet about your sex?” roared Mr. Perekatov, trying to beat his Englishman down and to hammer him into acquiescence in his will; for he regarded Stephen as *his* Englishman, who should become—God knows how—the type and symbol of what England stood for in the world, one who should sweep away the shameful things that hid the true England from the eyes of suffering Europe—the Foreign Office clerks who were so offensive to Russian journalists, the Censor, the Defence of the Realm Act, and Military Service.

“I’m sorry I told you,” rejoined Stephen, “but her name is du Toit, Valerie du Toit, so that she is not English, and there is no question of her being an angel. Still less is there any of my being happy, because I am married.”

Mr. Perekatov at once became sympathetic. There was always hope so long as his Englishman was not happy. He knew how the English were when they were happy: more like birds than men, pouring everything into the irrelevance of song.

"It is something," he said, "that she is not English."

"Everything!" replied Stephen heartily. "Everything! And she is beautiful."

"Of course!"

"In essence," continued Stephen. "I hardly remember what she is like."

"And you are going to see her?" asked Mr. Perekatov.

"To-morrow—or to-day, rather. Chinnery is going to take me to see her."

"Chinnery! Chinnery! Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Mr. Perekatov. "Ha, ha, ha! Chinnery! She is a friend of Chinnery's, a little friend of Chinnery's!"

The contempt with which he spoke was devastating, terrible, icy. He wanted to say more, but preferred to let his contempt stab home to Stephen's eagerness.

The hours had slipped by. Once more they had talked the night away, and the grey light began to creep through the green of the trees. That other dawn had only been a pale warning of this, whose light illuminated the glory of Stephen's admission of the love that had entered into him. There was no Time, and London was a remote place in which children played in a slum and a dog ran about with a ball in its mouth, asking for attention. Nothing that had happened, was happening, or would happen in time and place could matter. The sun rose from and sank into eternity, and the one moment when he had uttered the words, "I love," contained all life and all that lay beyond it.



In Mr. Perekatov's garden was growing a single flower, an aster. As he went away Stephen plucked it and held it tenderly against his breast. It was golden, like the light of the early morning sun, which was shining with a new and sudden heat. Early though it was, at the corner of the street were two old charwomen, who must have been drinking all night, for they were quarrelling and presently began to fight, throwing back their beaded capes and clawing at each other's black bonnets. Stephen smiled at them benignantly. The world was like that, but it did not matter. Everything that did not reach its perfection must fall away and decay and fester. As he passed the old women there emanated from them a loathsome influence which for a moment clung about his senses and numbed him. He choked, and tears came to his eyes as he said :

"Valerie and Perekatov will hate each other."

With that he took to his heels and ran as hard as he could, still holding the aster to his breast, and never stopped until he reached his rooms, where Mlle. Donnat was waiting for him in a state of alarm. She was struck by his pallor and cried out upon it, and half suspected that he had been drinking.

"I've been with Mr. Perekatov," he explained.

"Oh ! la ! la !" said Mlle. Donnat.

### §

Mlle. DONNAT had been thinking deeply about her little saint. She was a Catholic, and she

prayed for him as often as she went to church, which she did the more frequently after she had found her way into his life, as she wished to bear herself up into a condition of clairvoyance in which she could understand what had happened to leave him stranded so early in life. It was not long before she guessed, fairly accurately, that there had been a woman, and it is never long in London before a new friend meets some one who knows some one who knows. Among her clients there was an actress, who, visiting Mlle. Donnat and seeing the name Lawrie above a bell-pull, made inquiries and told the story, how, as a promising young man, he had fallen into the hands of an ambitious woman, who had looked to him to supply her with money and fame wherewith to make her friends jealous, and finding after five years that he cared not a button for either money or fame, had denounced him as a sponge and a wastrel, and returned to the society of birds of her own feather. . . . That was not how the story was told, for the actress was venomous in denunciation, and even asked who was keeping Stephen now, but that was how Mlle. Donnat, who loved him, heard it, and she burned with indignation at the suffering that he must have endured, and with contempt for the woman who had not known how to handle a *poète*.

## §

STEPHEN, who had forgotten the years of his marriage in his work, remembered them now in

his love. They seemed fantastic and incredible and like a bad joke : ashen in their sterility, and he was ashamed and humbled.

So humiliated was he that it distressed him to think that he had dismissed the Russians as nothing. They were more than himself : after all, they had an irrepressible physical vitality which it would take more than a woman to check. . . . But—but was not that also the trouble with Mr. Perekatov? Ah! but Perekatov had loved, while Stephen had simply let himself be cozened and cajoled and taken by a woman merely to show another lover that she was still attractive, with the result that he had taken to ideas as another might take to drink. Perekatov had loved! Perekatov had loved!

When he came to think of it Stephen recognised that this was why he respected Mr. Perekatov and trusted him. Of how many men and women could he say truthfully that they had loved? Three or four at the outside. Many whom he had known had loved love, more had loved themselves, but hardly any had surrendered, and he himself had wasted himself in trying to surrender to a wife who had regarded it as a dangerous weakness, one that would interfere with his "success." . . .

Such memories and thoughts were too painful, and he put them from him as disgustingly irrelevant.

Mlle. Donnat was the only creature he had ever met who respected his silence. She was too alarmed about him to leave him, and she flitted in and out of the room, feeding him at intervals



of every two hours, but never speaking to him. She thought he might be brooding over his work, and made his table ready for him.

About lunch-time a blue paper was served on him, and she burst into tears, thinking it must be a summons to join the Army, for which she could not imagine any one more fit. Her tears broke the apathy he was in, and he reassured her. The blue paper was only a summons to attend on a coroner's jury. The idea of corpses cheered him up wonderfully, and he broke into a vein of gay chatter and told her he was going to act on the cinema. She was horrified, and said she would never enter his room again if he did anything so vulgar and derogatory.

"Il faut vivre," he said.

She assured him that *un tel homme* could never starve.

*Un tel homme!* Such a man! What had he done to rouse admiration even in such a humble place as this? . . . He knew the answer to that question at once. It was enough that he did not belong to it and was trained and designed for something for which the humble had and needed a genuine respect. Why, then, was he here? Why? Why? . . . That, after all, was the question that had always plagued him, and with the new cheerfulness that was in him he was certain that he would be answered before very long. So certain was he that the question no longer greatly interested him. All that was external to him, and he was no longer concerned with externals. A passion had come into his life

which would either make or break him. . . .  
Valerie ! . . . Valerie !

## §

MR. PEREKATOV, when it suited him, could be a man of action. Having conceived the idea that Stephen Lawrie, his Englishman, was the one through whom the English would return to their senses and their most honourable traditions, he was not going to run any risk of his being wasted on a mere woman, and he determined to interfere. He knew from experience the devastating effect of Russian sincerity—he thought it was sincerity—upon English conventionalism, and determined that if Stephen was bent on making a fool of himself he should have a fight for it. Therefore he sought out Chinnery and flattered him by asking him to write for his paper in Moscow an account of the English revolutionary effort. Chinnery was not aware that there was such a thing, but at the safe distance of hundreds of miles he adored the Russian Revolution. Mr. Perekatov told him that his paper was immensely wealthy, and after peace was declared would open an office in London. Chinnery had no difficulty in discovering that there was an English Revolution, and went to the House of Commons to look for it. Already he saw himself as a great figure, married to Valerie du Toit, director of a Russian paper in England, and proprietor of a vast cinema undertaking. . . . What might not a man become when a new world was

taking shape, a world illuminated and driven by electricity: motor-cars, aeroplanes, turbine ships. Chinnery could see it all growing, with himself standing in the brightest light as the Anti-Christ of whom he had read, smoothing away all jealousy and rage, dissolving all difficulties, bringing peace and ease to women, the Pacifist acclaimed. . . .

He was more than a little irritated when Mr. Perekatov mentioned Stephen Lawrie. Valerie du Toit was always doing that, too. Apparently, without Stephen nothing could be done.

"My difficulty is this," he said: "Lawrie may be put in prison any day."

"Why?" asked Mr. Perekatov.

"He behaves as if he didn't know there was a war on!" said Chinnery in his shrillest tenor.

"Why should he know?" asked Mr. Perekatov; and Chinnery collapsed. All his beautiful dreams faded, and he knew, for the flash of one acutely miserable second, that he was absolutely dependent on these others. Then he perked up. His life was an adventure, and it was not often that London let fall into his hands persons of such potentialities as Stephen Lawrie, Mr. Perekatov, and Valerie du Toit. Though he could not tell exactly what, yet he knew that they would all three—in his sense of the word—*be* something. Stephen, he thought, was comfortably fixed up with Mlle. Donnat, and he supposed there must be some good reason why these other two should insist upon him. There was money behind the Russian paper, and there was money, he was sure, behind Valerie du Toit. It was long since Chinnery



had been anywhere near money, and he wriggled in its warmth. After all, these others would be helpless without him. He knew his London, and they were perfectly innocent of it.

If Chinnery's mode of living was reprehensible, he had at least the virtue that he loved his London. He adored and worshipped it. To please the West End of London he would have defiled his mother's grave.

He was to Mr. Perekatov, to whom the West End of London was hardly more than an offensive smell, a new type, and he found it interesting, though it horrified him to think that a woman attached to such a type could attract Stephen Lawrie, to defend whom he resolved to encounter the woman, to be with her his most coarsely and offensively Russian, that she might know the kind of people with whom Stephen Lawrie kept company. He had no difficulty in leading Chinnery through the theatre and the cinema to the subject of his prospective "star." Mr. Perekatov talked big about his friends among English journalists, and Chinnery, pricking up his ears, asked him if he would care to meet Miss du Toit.

"Du Toit?" said Mr. Perekatov. "Is she French?"

"I think she's Dutch: South African Dutch," said Chinnery; and, waxing poetic, he added, "She is so full of the sun that you could photograph her in a cellar."

"That's good," said Mr. Perekatov.

## §

So it came about that Mr. Perekatov had tea with Miss du Toit before Stephen. To the Russian's gloomy spirit the worst possible had happened, the more so as he could not define it. It was in vain that he told himself that there are people above race and independent of their surroundings. The quality of Valerie du Toit was, like her colouring, too subtle for description. Through her beauty, for instance, there sometimes loomed a strength that was massively ugly, and yet she was young, light, and positively delicate. Mr. Perekatov thought she was the youngest thing he had ever seen, but he could not away with a feeling that she was hiding something even from herself. Above all, what was she doing with that woman of the West End who looked at men with the one question in her mind: What money had they?

The room in which she received her visitors was on the top floor of a house above a shop. It was close to an underground railway, and when the trains passed the floor vibrated. The stair which approached this retreat was dark, tortuous and evil-smelling, and the inhabitants of the rooms below were, by the atmosphere they created, undesirable. Yet Valerie glowed with pride in her "flat," in the shabby chairs and table, in the old piano, and the wretched pictures on the walls. She had only just taken possession, and was having a bath put in.

Chinnery began, as soon as he entered, to upbraid her for not keeping promises she had made to him.

She flatly contradicted him, distorted everything he said until it sounded like impudence or nonsense, and imperceptibly led him out of his depth until he was floundering. Mr. Perekatov admired the skill with which it was done, but the assembly of personages was so incongruous that it hurt him, and he relapsed into a heavy silence, while Valerie talked about the wonders of London, the vast size of the Albert Hall, the multitudes of people, the wretched mediocrity of the shops. Her friend, Miss Atwell, gaped at her, obviously not understanding a word she said, but at the same time marvelling at her as at a Princess who had walked out of a fairy tale. . . . Mr. Perekatov at last began to find his bearings, and to perceive that here was a real aristocrat, one who was so intent upon a certain rare quality of existence that she would make straight for it and be blind to every external thing that stood in her way. He began to appreciate the girl, and the wounds left by his own suffering throbbed as he perceived in her the strain of some obscure, deep and almost overwhelming tragedy. Of that at least he was sure, and he was alarmed for Stephen, who had never suffered, and thought that it would go hardly with him if all that was pent up here should be let loose upon his innocence. Mr. Perekatov tried not to think it, but he was sure that everything in Valerie was concentrated upon Stephen, and that everything she said and did, everything and everybody wherewith she was surrounded, was arranged to disguise even from herself the one overwhelming thing that had taken possession of her. There was



more than enough revealed to account for the change in Stephen.

Chinnery, of course, saw nothing. He was fascinated and dazzled, and chattered away to conceal the exultation he felt as he thought of the money that would come pouring into his lap if only he could sit long enough at the feet of this beauty. He, too, was oblivious of her surroundings. He saw only the silk stockings, the wonderfully tailored costume, the shoes made to fit like a glove, the platinum chain about her still childish throat, and every now and then he turned his face away and wept, and murmured :

“ Child ! Child ! Dear child ! ”

At last Mr. Perekatov could bear it no longer, and he broke in :

“ What are you doing in London ? ”

She tossed her head and said scornfully :

“ I am an artist. There are only two artists in the world, and I am looking for the other one.”

Mr. Perekatov wagged his head up and down, and said slowly :

“ So ? Take care you do not throw everything away to spite yourself.”

“ If you knew me,” said Valerie, “ you would not speak like that.”

Mr. Perekatov acknowledged with a bow that she was too quick for him.

“ You are from the South,” he said. “ We are slower and deeper in the North.”

“ Deeper ? ”

“ I am a Jew, and some day I will tell you about Lassalle and Hélène von Dönniges.”

"Was she anything like me?"

"She took and wasted what was meant for mankind."

"Then she was not an artist."

"She was a woman, a spoiled woman, who thought she must have everything she wanted. The crowd worshipped Lassalle: she thought that if Lassalle worshipped her the crowd would do so too."

"She was a fool."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Perekatov.

Chinnery and Miss Atwell could only gape at the conversation and at each other. They were relieved when two other people entered the room: a young woman with short hair, wearing a man's hat sideways on her head, and carrying a cigarette in a long holder between her teeth; and a young man, smooth, vacuous, with oiled hair, flabby cheeks, and eyes that bore the marks of dissipation.

"Hullo, Chinnery!" said the young man. "Didn't expect to find *you* here."

"Hullo, Charles!" mumbled Chinnery.

"Hoped you'd come over to the studio for tea, Kid," said the young woman, whom Valerie introduced as her friend, Freda Carruthers.

Mr. Perekatov's brain jolted at the word "friend," this raffish, sly semi-demi-mondaine.

"Charles," said Vera admiringly, "has been discharged from the Army for misconduct."

"Yaas," said Charles. "Jolly well had to get out of it before the regiment was booked for France."

Mr. Perekatov saw Valerie's eyelids flicker down

in a flash of hatred that amounted almost to nausea. The others began to talk loudly, making with their gossip of studios and cafés a great parade of freedom and tolerance and of their being familiar with things that in conventional society were taboo. Mr. Perekatov sickened. He did not mind people being loose or dirty or anything they liked, so long as they really liked it and did not talk about it. This "programme" living that he found so prevalent in London was not at all to his stomach, and the more so now as he could not bring himself to believe that Valerie was taken in by it. She shone among these people like a bunch of flowers in a grimy street: the music of her personality was like that of the caged birds in the mews behind Stephen's lodgings. That idea gave him what he was seeking. Valerie was trapped. She was trapped in this appalling London, corrupted by the war, this dark prison of a London upon whose life the foul mantle of bureaucratic Russia had fallen. That revealed to Mr. Perekatov the reason why he had been feeling increasingly at home in London, and all the more could he understand how terrible it must be for this wild creature, who so obviously knew no law but her own passionate will. . . . The impression was too distasteful, too painful, and after a little while he excused himself and retired. As he closed the door he heard Freda Carruthers say:

"Lor, Kid, you do pick up some rummy cards."

He knew that this was said with a jealous glare at Miss Atwell, and he could not help smiling at the idea of these broken people huddling round



the warmth of Valerie's money like beggars round a coke fire, the fumes of which intoxicated and numbed them. Ought he not to warn Valerie? But what right had he to do so? Whither could she turn? Wherever she went she would find men and women eating, drinking, spending, seeking pleasure to keep out the horror with which they were surrounded. There was only Stephen who had had the strength to admit the complete negation of life that had been arrived at, and already she had turned to Stephen. It would be well for her, but would it be well for him? . . . Mr. Perekatov growled as he stumbled down the dark staircase and groped his way out into the shabby street.

## CHAPTER II

VALERIE DU TOIT

BECAUSE she had read *The Tempest*, Shelley's Poems and an unordered mass of English books, Valerie had imagined England to be a place in which any one who cared for these things would be welcome, especially if he or she had money, good manners and the distinction of careful breeding. At home she had been told that the English were robbers and murderers, and her grandfather and two uncles had been killed in the Boer War, but having met and danced with English officers, she brushed all that aside because she had found in them a gentleness not to be found in other men. Meeting friends who were going to England to work "for the war," she joined them in order for herself to find the wonder that had produced Ariel and Ferdinand and the other characters who were so much more real than any that were to be found in life.

And so to London! Immense, exciting, big enough to be lost in, and for life to become anonymous and free from the maddening tittle-tattle of a small community, whose whole activity was an unending game of beggar-my-neighbour, and from the rigid rules laid down for women in a society

where there are not enough to go round. At first, alarmingly, there was little difference between what she found and what she had left. The same futility of dressing, of meals in hotels and in large houses only too like hotels, and of polite and meaningless conversation: What did she think of the war? How did she like London? Were not the shops a revelation to her? The shops!

To escape she entered upon a course of training at a motoring-school, which she very soon found to be a swindle. Was there anything anywhere that was not fraudulent and corrupt? Freda Caruthers arrived on the scene, easy, slangy, free and apparently genuine: a widow, left so after one week's marriage and now proposing to live an independent life on her pension. Would Valerie join her? She had a flat to let, having just moved into a studio opposite. . . . Freda was, technically, a lady: she had a brother in South Africa, her people had a large house in the country.

A few days before at a hospital concert Valerie had met Miss Atwell, who had come to sing for her lunch: a real live actress, who, almost weeping, confessed that three days out of four she almost starved because she had to supply her own clothes out of four pounds a week. The idea of any one starving was to Valerie too horrible and incredible, and she adopted Miss Atwell on the spot, although Miss Atwell's manners and accent were distasteful to her, and after accepting Freda's proposal she arranged that Miss Atwell should live with her. Valerie had always had people dependent on her, and throwing on her the burden of their difficulties,



and she only began to live again when she was once more saddled with complexities. . . . In addition to these there was Howard Ducie, who had come over on the boat with her, was insisting that she should marry him, and had twice broken camp to see her when the indifference of her letters hurt him.

For a time she was happy and walked the air singing in her blood: "Me—flat—London." Independence, freedom, the realisation of every hope and every dream, an end, perhaps, of the maddening unreality of this English life that made her refer everything that happened and everybody she met to her home thousands of miles away. Now, now she would escape and live her own life in her own way, making her own mistakes and following out their consequences until she turned them into triumph, for there was a deeply moving will in her to defy life and anything in life to break her. That had not happened so far, though it was not for want of trying on the part of life, and there was some satisfaction in squaring up to this huge distracted London, with its soldiers, its officials, its air-raids, its daily tale of disaster and hideous loss of life. Valerie took in *The Times* newspaper every day simply to read the casualty list, for without that she could not believe that all these millions of people were really in their sober, quiet steadiness working to that ghastly end. . . . Letters from home were funny, so unable were the writers to imagine what was really happening, although they had had war in their own country not twenty years before, a war in which she had been born. Perhaps

that was why she could understand the significance of what was happening here in England.

Sometimes she told herself that as she would go home again nothing that occurred here could be real or enduring; she would leave it behind as she would leave most of her clothes. But that feeling was suddenly arrested when she met Stephen Lawrie and later Mr. Perekatov. There was a sudden irruption of purpose in what she was doing, and a meaning given to her presence in this strange country, how strange she often felt that no one but herself knew: a derelict country, a country living on the hypnotism of phrases, a shabby, neglected, decrepit, old-fashioned country inhabited by a rabble, among whom moved no distinguished figures, a country of old men corrupted and exasperated by old women.

"They're all dead!" said Valerie, on beholding some thousands of the English assembled for a concert in the Queen's Hall, and the smell of death was continually in her nostrils, for she had the mysterious power of sensing death which is only given to the most sensitive. That experience made her determined that she would only stay in England until her intelligence had confirmed what her instinct told her. . . . Better a thousand times her own new, raw country where the earth could enfold and comfort the human spirit than this maze of streets paved with impermeable stones. Yet she was reluctant always to leave London. The English countryside with its confining hedges and its excessive growth oppressed her. It seemed to her that the English must hate the earth that they had

so closely covered it up and divided it. Her own people loved the earth, and some of them sank into it so deeply that they almost ceased to think, and were aware only of the sun-lit days going by, and, as they believed, of God granting or withholding happiness.

"Whatever happens to you," her mother had said. "You have faith and you have breeding, and nothing can take them from you."

Seeing so much wretchedness everywhere, Valerie wanted to help. In her soul she took all who turned to her by the hand and led them home to the farm, where she had spent her childhood, the low, white one-storied building surrounded with the green of its mealie patch, its orange-groves, peach-trees and gardens shining in the vast brown space of the veldt. Often unhappy people came there from the English towns and stayed until they were comforted and made whole. She was proud of her own suffering, so different from the mean misery she saw everywhere. If only these English could suffer she might feel more at home among them, but they remained stupidly unmoved and their stagnation choked her. Being fearless herself she could not understand that people were numb with fright.

## §

FREDA CARRUTHERS was light-headed with her luck. Her brother in South Africa had written to her about Miss du Toit and her rich family, and had hinted that it might be worth her while to make friends and if possible to return with her, as



in the Transvaal a young woman need not remain unmarried for a week. Widowhood on less than two hundred a year was not a bright prospect for a woman of Freda's tastes. She regarded herself as a remarkable woman who had never been given a chance, and now at last fortune was giving her an opportunity. This she believed the more strongly when an acquaintance told her of Valerie at the motoring-school. At once she borrowed the fees and seized her chance with both hands, and immediately calculated that the rôle for her to play was that of the independent woman who did not care a rap for the old fetish of reputation. Hence the short hair, the man's hat, and the cigarette-holder.

Valerie was caught at once. She knew that the whole duty of woman is not fulfilled in being a perfect lady, and she admired Freda's courage and her defiance of the old women who seemed to have England in their clutches.

"My people are pretty decent," said Freda, "but my husband's people have cut up rough. Ruddy old fools!"

No sooner was Valerie installed in the flat than Freda asked if she would mind ordering her groceries for her, as the tradespeople were getting stingy owing to the war, and her credit didn't go very far. Valerie complied, and paid the bills without a murmur. It was such fun to be doing her own housekeeping and to have the shopkeepers, who soon scented money, almost clamouring for her to patronise them. In that region of genteel poverty a person who treated money as though it

were air was a dazzling phenomenon, and Freda soon had a large acquaintance for whom she kept open house and a free table. Valerie admired her generosity and the tender-heartedness with which she succoured waifs and strays : Charles, who was discharged from the army, and Björnson, who was a neutral cut off from his resources, Sladen who was a painter impoverished by the war, and Jordan who was, sometimes, a cinema-producer. They all talked a great deal, loudly defied the war, and to show their superiority to it, drank and danced into the small hours of every morning. That was why Freda had taken the studio, to have a place in which there could be "binges," as she called them, over which she could preside as a Queen in Bohemia.

Only one thing in Freda jarred on Valerie : her perpetual insistence on rich men. Bohemianism seemed to Valerie a repudiation of the money-standard. It must be that or nothing : but Freda was always insisting that rich men liked that sort of thing, and talking of how rich Jordan had been before the war. And sometimes, when towards the end of the month Valerie confessed that she had no money, Freda would say :

" Oh, but you are so rich ! "

Valerie was interested. There was here something the like of which she had never imagined, something different from the dead monotony of English life, something that, like herself, as she thought, had broken loose from passionate necessity, and having entered upon it she would not attempt to extricate herself until she had seen through to the farthest consequences of the plunge that Freda

had taken. Freda had said, and constantly repeated, that she was a free woman, that she was not like other women, and that she intended to work out her own life. Oh no, she did not believe in marriage, and she did not intend to have a child until she loved a man so much that she must have one. Till then she intended to find out for herself what life was like.

Valerie hardly listened to all this. She saw no gulf between herself and Freda; indeed she saw very little, except that she had a reason now for staying in England, and that this life of exile contained, in form, at least, the satisfaction she needed: room in which to grow without the constant exasperation of futile and empty occupations, dancing, the races, and the fever of gambling in mining shares, for which her upbringing in the old Dutch fashion in the devout simplicity of farm life on the veldt had unfitted her, and again she had very strongly the feeling that what happened here in England did not matter. She would return home presently and forget. And this feeling was strengthened by the war and the temporary insanity it was creating in every one with the suppressed enclosed existence that it enforced, so that everywhere there was a seething and a boiling which must surely end in a burst which would remove everything that was done and all memory of it. Valerie was infected with the general intoxicated feeling of irresponsibility.

Even if she had wished to extricate herself she could not. She suffered from the change of climate which had paralysed her energy, and often for days



at a time she could not move. The friends with whom she had come over had gone to hospitals in France, and she was cut off from the life she had known, except for mails and cables, which came more irregularly as the weeks went by, and for Ducie, who wished to marry her and take her away for ever.

He was romantic, a young Englishman who, usually for some passionate personal adoration, had thrown over every opening that had been offered to him, and at last, disappointed and sick of himself, had drifted out to South Africa to take up a commercial appointment, there resolved that he would never again expect from a human being what apparently was never forthcoming. On the outbreak of war he had joined up, because others had joined, and on the boat had been overcome more violently than ever before with an adoration for Valerie. He loathed the life of the camps in England, and the idea of going away to France and leaving Valerie alone in England tortured him night and day, and he thought that if he married her she would at least be safe. They corresponded regularly, because she could not be unkind to a man who had the appalling experience of the war in front of him, and besides, if she did not write, he broke camp and came up to see what was the matter. The one happy time of his life had been the voyage when, as the ship ploughed slowly through the blue sea under the hot sun, there had been nothing whatever to do but to adore Valerie, to triumph in the soldiers' sports for her, to make himself eminent and a hero among the commonplace people

to be worthy of her. . . . One day a man said she had run away from home. Ducie knocked him down for it, and there was a fierce battle in the fo'c's'le.

From that the plunge into squalid war-ridden England was too violent a change, and he had to fight every moment of his days to preserve the lovely memory of the voyage. That it had meant as much to Valerie he never doubted, for he was an egoist, and thought the world must be concerned with him even if it were only to torment him, and, being extremely handsome, he had never known a time when women did not court him.

He was horrified when he called on Valerie, after her plunge for independence, and found her at tea with Freda and Freda's motley acquaintance in the studio. To begin with, it was not a very nice studio: it was very big, very dark, very dirty and neglected. The artist who had occupied it was at the war, and his indifferent canvases disfigured the walls. There were shabby rugs on the floor that had not been polished for a very long time, dusty easels, a more dusty model throne, and the only redeeming feature was an enormous fire that blazed in a great fireplace. By this sat Valerie shivering, while Freda and her friends were sitting round a table bolting cakes and bread-and-jam as though they had not seen food for a very long time.

Ducie approached Valerie with a proprietary air that made her for the moment detest him. She was annoyed with him also because he was not Stephen, who, after promising twice to come with

Chinnery, had failed to put in an appearance. There was a moment of uneasiness so violent as to make some of the others look up. Freda, as hostess, came over and welcomed the visitor, who eyed her distastefully as he accepted the cup of tea she brought to him.

He sat by Valerie's side and said in a low, furious voice :

"What the hell are you doing among these people?"

"They are artists," she said.

"Artists!"

"They are alive any way. When you are all going out to murder, how can you object to any one?"

"There is a limit," he said.

"Where?" she asked, with the quick irrelevance that he always found irresistible. He could only laugh and say :

"Well—there is."

"You pretended to be an artist on the boat. If you were a real artist nothing—nothing on earth would take you from your work, and life would be something with which you had no particular concern."

"Oh, come," he said. "I joined because I couldn't stay out of it."

"Do something and get discharged then."

"I'm going to stay here now I am here, and I'm going to see you through. You're dangerous."

"To whom?"

"To yourself."

Valerie flung away from him. His presence



here was an intrusion. He belonged to the voyage, and that was in the past. She had very strongly the sense of the fitness of persons, and here he was out of tune and out of place, yet she could not be unkind to him because of what lay in front of him. Always, always she had had great difficulty in shaking people off. Perhaps she gave them more than she was aware of giving.

He was so hurt that he walked away and looked round the studio at the pictures and the books, none of which had been touched for months. Valerie called to him in a low voice, and at once he was by her side.

She said :

“ I have begun without you.”

“ Begun—what ? ”

“ To write.” And a little disdainfully she handed him a copy-book, on the first page of which was inscribed :

“ MAXIMS OF VALERIE DU TOIT.”

On the next page, all by itself, were two words :  
“ Be terrible.”

They shocked him so that his head jolted back, and she nodded and said :

“ You don’t understand that. But life is terrible.”

“ Oh yes. I understand that.”

“ You don’t.” She snatched the book out of his hands. “ You don’t. You understand it with your brains.”

“ How else should I ? ”

“ With every part of you.”

He protested that he did because that was exactly how he loved her.

The others had eaten everything on the table, and they produced a gramophone and began to dance. Some more people came in, and Ducie stood between them and Valerie to protect her. . . . He had been through it all himself when he was young: had been seduced into mistaking rowdiness for freedom; and there was actually here in the room one man whom he remembered as being loose in London ten years before, not changed by a hair, and presumably still leading his penniless existence, living only for physical pleasures, and obtaining them by attaching himself to an elated party and paying in scandalous reminiscences: the kind of man who in a foreign capital would make a living as a guide to the night-life of the place.

He was so angry that he took three strides forward, seized the man by the scruff of the neck, dragged him to the door and kicked him out. The man stood still for a moment rubbing his rump and then limped off down the street. He was used to it. He had had his meal, and one way or another, after he had eaten, he was always kicked out.

When Ducie returned Valerie was talking to Björnson, whom she introduced as a Norwegian poet. From under his coat Björnson produced a type-written play, which he presented as another might present a card. Inside the play were letters of commendation from theatre-directors in Stockholm, Berlin, Paris and Brussels, and while Ducie

was glancing through the bulky script Björnson resumed his whispered conversation.

"Five pounds!" he said. "I must have five pounds or my landlady will turn me into the street and I shall have to sleep in St. Martin's Church. I am expecting money."

With one eye on Ducie he stood stiffly erect, tucked his hand into his bosom and took on the air of a European celebrity. Valerie also in a whisper promised him that he should have five pounds, and he said aloud:

"I will dedicate my play to you when it is published."

Ducie scratched his head. This was something new to him, and he did not know but that Björnson might in fact be a starving genius. He gravely returned the play and muttered that he would some day like to read it. Björnson bowed and returned to the group who were dancing.

"Come out of it, Valerie," said Ducie. "Let us go and dine. I wish to God I hadn't got to go back. Do you live here?"

"No."

She slipped away with him, proudly to show him where she lived, and he had another rude shock when he met Miss Atwell, who greeted Valerie with:

"Hullo, ducky! Don't forget to get me in a bottle of stout for after the show."

Miss Atwell was hastily dressing to be in time for the first house at an outlying music-hall. After she had gone Ducie hung his head and said in a low voice of subdued despair:



"My God! What a lot for *you* to know."

Valerie flared up on that and said :

"That shows how much you know me. If you did you wouldn't even *see* the people round me."

When she blazed out at him Ducie could never stand up to her. The force in her blew his arguments to pieces. His mind was, as it were, scorched by the fire that was in her.

"All right," he mumbled. "One has to accept everything you do, because it is you."

"Of course," replied Valerie.

He laughed and said :

"Well, you live up to your maxim."

He had not seen her without her hat. She took it off now and shook out her thick hair.

"Good God!" he cried, "what have you done?"

She had had her hair cut short, her glorious, ruddy, golden hair. It was as though his own eyes had been put out.

"Don't you like it?" she asked.

"The colour is wonderful, but—but all that glorious hair."

"Yes. The barber cried when he was doing it. He said it was worth ten pounds."

"You didn't sell it?" he asked furiously.

"Oh no. I said he could have it. I couldn't put it up like an ordinary lady."

He half believed that the Carruthers woman had made her sell it to get money for her, but he dared not say so, partly to avoid hurting her, partly because he was too hurt himself. Any change from the adorable beauty of the voyage hurt him terribly, and yet he knew that at her age there

must be sudden and violent changes. Nothing, however, could make acceptable so violent a transformation as this, from rare ease and elegance to this dingy fevered independence, except the fact that, being Valerie, she was both violent and sudden, very like the life from which she had come, in which men were ruined one week and millionaires the next. He wished to God he were not so inarticulate. This England to which they had come was so different from what he remembered and what he had dreamed that every day brought its shock to emphasise the slow, dragging misery of disappointment: dirty camps, a stupid, antiquated discipline, a London that had nothing to offer but restaurants, music-halls and hospitals.

"I wish to God you could go home," he said.

"How can I go home? There is no life there, only money and marriage."

"What do you want?"

"I'm an artist."

"Be a human being first," he almost shouted in his exasperation at being unable to get to the point. He wanted to make her see that tolerance of music-hall actresses, war widows, and occupationless neutrals was a blind, wicked waste of herself.

"If you were an artist," she said, "you would let them put you in prison, you would let them kill you before you would take life. Your business is to create life."

"Where did you get that from?" he asked.

"From thinking about you."

"You do think about me then?" he said eagerly.

"Don't I write to you every day?"

"Once a week."

"Oh, well. I write every day, but I don't always post the letters."

"Give them to me, Valerie. I love you. I couldn't live if you loved any one else. That isn't artistic, but it's human."

"You said you were an artist on the boat."

"I know I did. Don't torture me, Valerie. Don't you see how different things are? There we were isolated, but here everything is real and horrible. It seems impertinent even to think of love, and it is just because I love you that I can't let the other fellows go out over there to be killed and maimed. It is like beating against a wall that has to be broken down. Don't you see that?"

"No."

"Then you don't love me?"

She was silent, and her silence terrified him so that he could resist no more and became abject.

"I can't go over there if you don't love me," he said, almost whimpering. "I can't go. I'm afraid."

She thought of him as he had been on the boat, the brilliant hero, the one man out of thousands who had character and capacity. What had happened to him so dreadfully to reduce him? With her passion was swift, sure, and whipped out of her in a rushing flame; and she was passionate in everything she did. She remembered her mother saying that Englishmen were hopeless: a woman could kindle them up to a certain point and no further: they would then cling to a point of honour



or money-making, and that would be the end of them.

"If you don't believe in what you are doing, don't do it," she said.

"Is that another maxim?" asked Ducie, a little bitterly.

"Yes."

"But I do believe in it," he said. "I can't argue myself out of it. I've got to satisfy myself that I'm not a coward. It . . . it's a matter of background."

"Now you're talking!" she cried.

"All right," he said. "I'll just prove that you're wrong. I'll go out as soon as I can and come back and prove . . . But I can't leave you as you are, Valerie. It's your hair that has made everything all wrong."

"It will soon grow. It was all shaved off when I had enteric, and it grew again in six weeks."

"One thing you've done," he said. "You've made it impossible for me to take a commission. I can only go through it at its very worst just to prove to you——"

He looked so wretched that she could not be cruel to him any longer, and she held out her hand with a friendly smile. He took and kissed it and murmured:

"Oh, Valerie! you can do as you like with me. You can make me anything, anything in the world."

"Then go to prison."

"You know I can't do that."

He thought she was just capriciously asserting

her power over him, but she was expressing her conviction. The women who took an hysterical delight in the war were of all those concerned in it the most shameful, and she had been in a state of increasing reaction ever since at lunch one day, with her opulent friends, she had met a woman, the wife of a politician, who had broken into a rhapsody over the Dardanelles and had chanted voluptuously about the beautiful white bodies of the young men gashed and spattered with blood. That had been a turning-point, and had made it impossible to stay among the well-to-do women who found hospital dress becoming and gloated ghoulishly over the sufferings of the men in the wards. And the answer to all this death came from her will to live, a will so strong that it swept aside her charm, her sex, her intelligence, possessed her and, in spite of her youth, made her a living prophecy. Far more than she could be aware of she had denied and repudiated the war and the havoc it had made of the human scene, but she could not explain herself or what had happened. Her will desired to kindle a similar will in Ducie, and, indeed, in everybody with whom she came in contact. Somehow it made life look very thin and very comic, and all purely personal desires ludicrous.

"The glory of a woman is her hair," said Ducie solemnly, and Valerie knew that his love for her was human and profane, and therefore inappropriate both to the time and to herself. Yet its humanity comforted her, and she could not bear to hurt it.

He had three days' leave, and she spent every

moment of the time with him, and made him happy by promising that he should take her down to see his people as his prospective bride.

## §

LIFE had become very strange. Things happened without clearly marked moments or events. It was as though the development of generations had to be crammed into a few years. Every one seemed to be living as though they were in a desperate hurry to overtake something that was going to happen. Yet Valerie was certain that everything had happened, and that life had become only a matter of making the consequences emerge. It was no use trying to understand: that only ended in trite formulæ and glib words. So Valerie sat still and wrote maxims, and disinterestedly watched the rapid degradation in the people with whom she was surrounded, accepting it, by instinct, as typical. In these people there was no attempt made to cover it up, and they were only different from the woman who had gloated over the young men at the Dardanelles in their frankness. The pressure of the war had cracked them like nuts, and most of them were empty.

Chinnery came almost every day to urge her to fall in with his cinema projects, and she made appointments with him which she did not keep. He wept with disappointment.

"You are so wonderful," he would cry, "so wonderful with your beautiful legs and your glorious hair flying in the breeze. I'll give up everything



for you, everything. I won't be a pacifist any more, if you don't like it."

What irritated Valerie about him, as about so many people in this strange country, was their mania for quick results, their inability to wait until life germinated and put forth something that was really worth while. They all wanted to call attention to themselves, and they were all like the suburban people whose family portraits were used to advertise the fact that they had been cured of a certain itch by an ointment. It was not the cure that was advertised so much as the itch. Chinnery itched: everything in him turned to an itch, and he wanted to tell the world, or, rather, London, especially the West End, about it. The love he protested so continuously was only an itch, and Valerie in good ringing tones said:

"Voetsak!"

She enjoyed saying Voetsak to Chinnery, for it was like saying it to all this itching London with its bloodthirsty women, fussy, pompous men, its soldier poets, its pacifists, its cinema heroes and heroines, its actors and buffoons, waiters, staff-officers, temporary gentlemen and its overwhelming deluge of newspapers crammed with advertisements of the various kinds of itch. . . . This was the city that had dared to destroy the life of the Dutch republics, the hard-won, peaceful life of her people. . . . How much she loved them she had never known until now, with their strong, decent, orderly life drawing its sustenance from the love of the earth and the sun and the wind. Ah! she imagined herself back again on the kopje behind the farm at home

brooding on the wonderful life that must exist somewhere in the world, where everything that moved through the soul could be told and understood, and there would not be the stormy clouds of greed and lust for ever gathering and for ever breaking. As a child the constant succession of storms had made her weep so many tears that now she had none left. The old people said it was because of the English and their gold-mines that life had become like that, but here she was among the English, and they were neither great nor powerful, but only panic-stricken and sullen, hysterical and full of this appalling hunger to betray themselves. They were shabby, and because of that she liked living in her shabby rooms and knew that she could not leave them until she understood. Her own people were stricken, but these were in a far worse plight, looking everywhere for a saviour instead of saving themselves.

## §

MISS ATWELL disapproved of Chinnery and warned Valerie against him. Much of Valerie's time was taken up with these people warning her against each other : Miss Carruthers against Chris Atwell, Charles against Björnson, Björnson against Charles, and all in return for this valuable service, borrowed money, or clothes, or a trunk, or a jewel to pawn. They were hungry, or if they only had five pounds they could get a job. Miss Atwell borrowed a fur coat to go to the agents, and she wore it day in day out, and even, when it was cold, slept

in it. To them Valerie seemed to be an inexhaustible store of money, and it was in vain that she protested that she had only an allowance. She was used to money, and to breathe her atmosphere was like strong drink to them.

There were parties every night at the studio, and many guests turned up uninvited. When the door was opened to them they said : " Is the party here ? " and came in : all sorts and kinds of men and women, ladies, fine and fast, young gentlemen from Government offices, soldiers home on leave, women of the town, artists, journalists, such a medley that no figure clearly emerged for Valerie, when she attended, which was not often, and she had a horrid memory of leering alcoholic faces, whisky bottles, loaves of bread, oranges and cigarette ends, and the extraordinary thing was that these gatherings never moved out of squalor ; they seemed from the very first moment to wither into débris : orange peel, cigarette ends, and Björnson lying drunk on the floor.

Miss Atwell said the line must be drawn somewhere, and she refused to attend, and she warned Valerie that Freda Carruthers was up to some game.

" It is only her idea of seeing life," said Valerie, defending her friend.

" She knows what life is as well as I do, or as well as a dog does. If she hasn't smelt money somewhere I'll eat my fur coat."

A kind of frenzy brewed up in the studio, and very soon there was a continual stream of people going to and fro : all day and all night long cabs



drove up and men and women got out and others climbed in and drove away. The place had a horrible fascination for Valerie, and she wanted to understand in order to break it. Freda had told her once that a man called Logan had lived there who had afterwards murdered the girl he lived with: a great painter and a wonderfully beautiful girl who had driven him mad with her jealousy. The story had given Valerie a thrill of satisfaction that there could still be a passion strong enough to reach a conclusion, something that would not dwindle away into *débris*, orange-peel and cigarette-ends. . . . Was it long ago? Oh no, at the beginning of the war, just at the time when everybody had broken loose.

Valerie went more frequently to the studio and sat in the wide fireplace looking on, and she explored the place: the little bedroom from the door of which the outside handle had been removed, the dingy kitchen and the dining-room that now looked like a bar, so full was it of bottles, full and empty. . . . The atmosphere was suffocating. It was like a place to which neither light nor air could penetrate, yet it pleased Valerie as somehow right, appropriate, typical. The very grimness of its squalor satisfied her as being inevitable, the proper and true expression of people who had been cracked and found empty. It hurt her too, but that kind of pain she expected from anything that was true.

She was to receive a more serious hurt. One night, very late, when one party in the studio was clustered round a roulette table and another was dancing to the gramophone, Chinnery arrived,

followed by Mr. Perekatov, Stephen Lawrie, and a number of Russians. Chinnery went into the dining-room and came out again with half-a-dozen bottles. Mr. Perekatov seized a bottle in his great hairy hand, broke the neck and poured the contents down his throat. Then he began to dance like a bear, and afterwards systematically began breaking the studio up. He kicked a chair to pieces, seized a table and hurled it on the floor. Then he held up his hand and said :

“ Messieurs, silentium ! Kerensky is in league with Korniloff.”

It was an announcement of incredible tragedy, and the English people looked scared and uneasy, both the gamblers and the dancers were arrested in their aimless dissipation by this debauchery that had a purpose, namely, to drive consciousness deeper into the agony of the soul.

Mr. Perekatov's glasses dropped off his nose and were smashed on the floor. His tragic face looked sightless and his hands came out like a blind man's as he tottered heavily across the room crying :

“ Lawrie, my glasses are broke, heh ? Lawrie, my glasses are broke, heh ? ”

This small tangible calamity seemed to satisfy him, for presently he stood still and wagged his head in approval, repeating :

“ Lawrie, my glasses are broke, heh ? ”

The English people stood round him looking on in fearful disgust. To be so tragic was bad form, and to drink so deliberately and fiercely was outside the pale. When he went down on his hands and knees and groped for his glasses they began to

laugh nervously, but Valerie, watching him, began to weep silently, and she was amazed at the ease with which the tears ran down her cheeks. He came towards her and got up on his knees and put his great hands on her lap and said :

“Lyda!” . . .

Valerie’s heart turned to stone, so terrible was the anguish that she felt in him, so tremendous the passion that moved in his mighty frame, and she almost wished that she were indeed Lyda that she might comfort him.

“Lyda!” he said, making the word beautiful and liquid in the tenderness with which he spoke. “Lyda! I cannot see you because my eyes are streaming with blood. My glasses are broke, Lyda!”

He came nearer and nearer to her, and said in a very low voice, very confidentially and intimately :

“I will tell you something. I have found a man who can tell us how to love, Lyda, and it will not be as it has been.”

Valerie said :

“Can’t you see?”

“No. My eyes are streaming with blood.” With that he seemed to recover himself a little and apologetically, as if to account for it, he whispered :

“Your voice is so like.”

He put his fingers to his lip as though to say that he and she shared a great secret and she nodded.

Stephen Lawrie, who had not noticed what was going on, so bewildered had he been for a few



moments by the extraordinary medley of persons, and so disturbed by the violent impact of the Russians and the English, saw at last the little scene in the fireplace. To walk straight over would be to attract attention. He turned to the Russian Jewess who had played so great a part in the scene at Mr. Perekatov's house, and started her talking. It was exactly like winding up a doll. He had only to say :

"The news from Russia is very inspiring."

At once her mouth opened and out poured a flood of words, French, English, Russian, even German in a shrill voice that drilled into the nerves of every one present and created the diversion he needed. Then he walked over to the fireplace and laid his hand on Mr. Perekatov's shoulder.

"You must find your glasses," he said.

Mr. Perekatov patted his waistcoat-pocket and said, nodding triumphantly :

"I have. I have. The essential part; the nose part is here . . . here. I have——"

The intoxication of Mr. Perekatov was immense and tragic like the rest of him. It frightened all the rest, but Stephen and Valerie could understand it; and when Mr. Perekatov presently rolled back and sat heavily huddled on the floor, they stood on either side of him and were together in the one purpose of protecting the giant, this huge hulk of a man from the impertinent curiosity of the others who had become no more important than a swarm of gnats. They soon wearied of the drunken man, who was neither amusing nor horrible, and they were more than a little afraid of the purity in

Stephen and Valerie, and went on with their gambling and dancing, while the Russians clustered in a corner and were soon lost in their exciting manipulation of collective emotion. Only Chinnery stood apart ecstatically watching the group in the fireplace as a finale for the film. He was more than ever certain that Stephen and Valerie were made for it, though he did not quite know what he should do with Mr. Perekatov.

Stephen was possessed with an exultant feeling that that for which he had always longed had happened. The hard world against whose walls he had battered for so long and so vainly had opened and found room for him in no busy and bewildering place but in its very heart. The incongruity of their surroundings made the realisation all the more acute. Valerie stood with her head thrown back, every vein of her body thrilling with delicious laughter at the splendid joke of it all, that here in shabby London she should have unearthed a treasure greater than all Africa could contain. She wanted there and then to take him home and to say "This is my man." They would say: "How much money has he?" and she would reply: "None," and laugh at them all.

"Ach, man!" she said in the bird-like sing-song of her race. "Let us go—so long!"

Stephen did not hear her words, only the song of her voice racing through his veins; and through the smoke-cloud he saw Chinnery and could not help laughing with pleasure. It was through Chinnery that all this had come about.

"The glasses are broke, Lawrie, heh?" said Mr. Perekatov, and he, too, through the stupor of his drunkenness began to laugh.

Chinnery was not without sensibility. The thought of these two on the screen was too much for him and he plunged into the dancing party, seized a young woman and kissed her. Suddenly everybody was very happy. People began to laugh and sing, and a young Russian broke away from his group and danced wildly up and down, squatting on his heels and kicking out his legs one after the other. For the first time the squalor of the place was broken. Some of the English people could not bear it and stole away, saying: "These Russians are mad!"

Stephen was satisfied. That which he had always believed and dreamed had come to pass. The horror of the world had been that love could not come to life in it. That horror was broken for ever.

"I must see Perekatov home," he said.

"Oh, let Chinnery do that," Valerie protested; "you needn't go."

"He's like a log," said Stephen, trying to help Mr. Perekatov up. "It will take both of us. I will come to-morrow, if I may."

"To-night."

"No. I will come to-morrow."

Valerie could not bear him to go. She wanted to put her arms round him to keep him; and, in fact, she took hold of his arm as he heaved at Mr. Perekatov. How thin it was, and how pinched and grey was his face, out of which his eyes shone with a



light that pierced through to the depths of her being, making her feel that she was full of the tenderest and most searching light; and she thought as she slipped out into the street that as the stars twinkled down at her so she must be visible to them. She could not keep still. Running her hand through her hair she could hear it crackle, and imagined that it was giving out golden sparks to fill the air with stars that should signal to those in the sky. In the studio the gramophone was still huskily wheezing. The door opened, and Stephen and Chinnery came out with Mr. Perekatov stumbling heavily between them. He was leaning forward and his legs trailed behind him, and still he repeated:

"Lawrie, the glasses are broke, heh?"

"You're coming to-morrow?" said Valerie.

"To-morrow," replied Stephen.

"Can I come too?" asked Chinnery.

"Certainly not," called Valerie, as she ran across the road floating blissfully on her happiness, so that she seemed to soar up the stairs and without knowing how, found herself in bed sitting up, waiting for Chris Atwell to come in from her music-hall.

## §

EARLY the next morning Valerie was up and out to buy flowers, with which she filled her room because Stephen was coming. It was a Saturday and Chris Atwell had to be at her music-hall at one, but all morning she sat heavily over the fire with her skirt up to her knees warning Valerie against

the dangers of life in general and Chinnery in particular.

"Don't you listen to anything that's not in the way of marriage, ducky," she said. "Look at me. I listened to all that when I was sixteen, and I've been on the hop ever since, and hardly ever a bit o' luck. You're the best stroke of luck I've had for years, and I'm not fit to live with you."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Valerie. "Aren't we all the same?"

"No, we're not," replied Chris. "Don't you make no mistake about it. Some are straight and some are not. I may have had to scratch for my living and my duds, but I've always been straight. Now that Chinnery——"

"Oh, do leave Chinnery alone. He's never done you any harm."

"Does he ever pay back the ten shillings and the half-crowns he's borrowed?"

"He must be very poor. His heels are always worn right down."

Chris stared a little incredulously. She could not understand any one worrying about poverty when there was so much of it.

She was in no hurry to be gone, because she felt that Valerie wanted her out of the way. So she stayed chattering, indulging in the luxury of looking back from the sunlit eminence, where there was money regularly every month, upon the life she had led of falling in and out of work, always having to owe a little more than she could possibly make. She could not understand Valerie, and expressed her amazement with the words :

"Well, you *are* a caution!"

"What's that?" asked Valerie innocently, genuinely anxious to know.

Miss Atwell hitched her dress a little higher above her knees and began to suck an orange. She rarely took her meals regularly, and hardly ever sat down to table. Valerie could neither share nor approve her habits, and very frequently went without food altogether. Miss Atwell foraged, and after her orange took some soup, some cheese, celery, biscuits, and wound up with potted meat. She ate very slowly and discursively, because she knew that Valerie was aching for her to go. Her presence became intolerably oppressive. Here was half the day gone and Stephen had not come. It would be terrible if he were to come and find Miss Atwell there eating! And the worst would be if he should feel that she was ashamed of her friend.

"The fur coat brought me luck, ducky," said Miss Atwell. "I'm leaving the Chink and going in with a Yid who's got an electric act. It may mean a world tour."

"You mean you're going away?" said Valerie quickly.

"Oh, you could come too, ducky. You'd make a fine little dancer. I'll speak to the Doctor about it."

"Is he married?" asked Valerie.

"I don't think so."

"Then he shall marry you."

Miss Atwell bridled at that. She let her skirt down and stood up.

"You *are* one for ideas," she said. "Well, I



must off it now. I'll bring back a bit o' fish for my supper."

At the idea of her going Valerie enjoyed for a moment her old pleasure in her friend's immense coarse vulgarity, the raw, loose quality against which at home she had been so carefully guarded, that life had been made to appear monstrous and awful—and most terrible of all in its remoteness.

As she put on her hat Miss Atwell said :

"I shall have to get a new dress for the new act. I don't know how I shall ever afford it. Yellow plush and a golden feather in my hair and yellow satin shoes." . . . She hesitated for a moment. . . . "You could get me credit, dearie."

"I'll give you the dress."

"Oh, ducky, that's too much. There'll come a time when I can do something for you."

"No one can do anything for me," said Valerie, with one of her astoundingly sudden jets of assertive personality.

Miss Atwell gaped.

"Eh?" she said, and not another sound could she pass through her lips.

She went down the long, dark stairs shaking her head. Valerie was altogether beyond her. The force in her made wealth and fur coats and motor-cars seem easily procurable, only directly these things were thought of in connection with her they vanished and Miss Atwell's simple mind was all at sea, for to her the whole duty of women lay in getting as much out of men, either in marriage or out of it, as possible; and surely Valerie, with her beauty and her liveliness and her extraordinary

generosity was entitled to put forward demands which there could be no satisfying. To be sure, as Miss Atwell put it, Valerie had a "hell of a temper," but that if anything was an additional asset. A real good flare-up was often the shortest road to a pearl necklace.

"It beats me," said Miss Atwell as she walked into the underground station. "She's a lucky one, she is."

She was alarmed, as she walked down the stairs of the station, by a sense of momentum, of being caught up in something that was moving altogether too fast for her, and as the train came in she sickened with a sudden dread of an impact between the train and the movement into which she had been swept. Being unused to sudden and unintelligible emotions, she said to herself:

"It's the war, that's what it is. Making everybody a bit jumpy."

## §

SHE had left a horrible débris behind her which Valerie could hardly bear to touch, and she thought for a moment that she would wait for Stephen downstairs and make him take her out to Hampstead, but she conquered her aversion and tidied up and sat by the fire, curled up in a big chair with her note-book on her knees, sketching imaginary Stephens: Stephen as he was, and Stephen as she would make him, a strong man beautiful to behold; one who by his mere presence kindled all around him and made them shed their pitiful ways, their

devastating cleverness and their craven respect for the barrier that stood between one man and another. . . .

Hours went by and he did not come. She prepared tea for him, and because he did not come she took none herself. She laid dinner for two, and because he did not come took only a little soup, as she was almost faint with hunger.

At last, about ten o'clock, far down in the house there sounded the faint tinkle of the rusty bell. Valerie flew to the door and opened it and stood listening. There were voices, footsteps on the stairs coming very slowly up towards her. As they reached the last flight she closed the door. Presently there came a light knock. She waited, and there was another slightly louder knock.

She opened, and Stephen came in. He flushed and stood stock still when he saw her. She walked quietly over to the fire and sat in her big chair. For a moment or two he could not move, so astonished and hurt was he by the shabbiness of the room, which was lit by one incandescent gas-burner, the globe of which was broken. The flowers in their profusion reassured him a little, but they could not remove the vast discrepancy between Valerie and her surroundings. Out of all his recollection only his own room could equal this for shabbiness and decay. The impression it made on him was like a bad joke designed to spoil the beauty that was like ice burning into his soul. He came slowly towards her and stood looking down at her. With her head turned away as she gazed into the fire, she looked just a slip of a child until



she turned her eyes up to take in the wonder of his presence.

"I tried hard not to come," he muttered.

Valerie drew her pencil lightly to and fro over the cover of her note-book. . . . So he was going to be absurd! He was going to attempt to deny! That was foolish of him, but what she had half-expected. It would not be easy for him to give up his solitary thought.

"I came to tell you," he went on, "that I must not, will not, and cannot see you again."

Her eyes travelled past him to the dinner-table. She guessed that he was hungry. If his day had been as full of her as hers had of him that was more than likely.

"I had lunch for you, and tea, and dinner."

"I'm sorry," he said, and involuntarily he turned round to the table. Before he could turn again Valerie was up and at the table and helping him to food.

The meal was eaten in silence, while he looked ruefully round the room. He could not, he knew, repeat what he had said. He could only do as she wished. Therefore he ate, although he could taste nothing, and when she offered him more he could not refuse.

Only once did he make a remark. He looked across at the little old cracked piano and said:

"Do you play?"

"No. Do you?"

"Two or three tunes I learned when I was a boy. An aunt of mine thought I had a musician's touch. . . . I played the 'Dead March' in *Saul*

once when my father was ill, and he would never let me touch the piano again. He said I wanted him to die. . . .”

With that he relapsed into silence, though a faint twinkle gleamed for a moment across his big, sorrowful eyes. Valerie wanted to hug him for that. There was no one like him in the whole world, no one who had that gentle, deep, tender laughter.

She asked him suddenly :

“ How old are you ? ”

“ I’m thirty-two.

She calculated rapidly. He could not possibly begin to find himself before he was forty. She would have seven—eight years of him, helping him not to be bewitched by the laughter that was in him and to know it as his strength.

“ I’d like to play you my little tunes,” he said, rising from the table. He sat at the piano, which was out of tune and had some notes missing, but under his hands gave out a faded sweetness as he played his schoolgirl music, a German waltz, a Beethoven sonata, a Clementi minuet. They sounded like a musical box, and she thought of him as a small boy playing, probably in the dark, with the tears streaming down his face. She was sure that, like herself, he had been miserable as a child, through feeling too much in the midst of insensibility.

She made up the fire and turned out the incandescent light with its greenish glare, and presently he came over very quietly and sat on the floor with his back against her chair. They did not touch each other. There was no need for that, nor did

they need to see each other. This was fulfilment, the satisfaction of all purposes. Whatever came afterwards could only be repetition and variation. Sometimes they spoke, but their words were only the brimming over of joy that moved between them, in and through them, and gave them all knowledge, all ecstasy, all pain and all delight. . . . Most often they were silent, far beyond either laughter or tears, filled with the rarest understanding that needed no expression. Outside themselves they heard, they saw, they felt nothing. Within themselves they felt their souls absorbed into the great sustaining soul that bears all things so easily upon its mighty movement.

At last groping slowly back to recollection, Stephen said :

“ Lawrie, the glasses are broke, heh ? ”

And Valerie broke into her pixie-like laughter, and cried :

“ Mr. Perekatov ! I love Mr. Perekatov ! ”

Chris Atwell returned soon after one o'clock. She came singing up the stairs, and Valerie just had time to light the gas before she came in. Stephen rose and stood blinking with his hair standing on end, and Miss Atwell after a moment's awful hesitation said weakly :

“ Oh, it's you ! ”

And she thought of him distastefully as the man who had eaten all the cake without offering her any.

Stephen mumbled excuses and slipped away. It was intolerable to stay with Valerie in the presence of a stranger.



Valerie ran down the stairs after him and opened the door at which he was fumbling. They stood together on the threshold and looked up at the stars. There was a strong wind blowing and little puffs of dark cloud were trailing across the sky.

“Good-night,” said Stephen. There was no sense of separation in leaving her. Wherever he went now, which ever way he adventured, she would be at the end of it. That he gave her neither touch nor caress hurt Valerie, jealous of the night that so soon, so soon would cover him from her sight. He never turned, though she waited in the hope that he would. She was before his eyes, living in every part of him, the beloved, the new-found, the revelation. Here at last was a flame that nothing could quench, a truth that could not be denied. For the present it was theirs. They were cut off from the world going down into destruction. Except through Mr. Perekatov they had no contact with it. She was an exile as much as he, because, like him, she had sought and had insisted on the possibility of this very illumination and was prepared, as he had done, to sacrifice everything for it, home, friends, ambition. He knew none of the facts of her life and required none. Sharing life and love they shared everything incidental to them.

### §

“So it’s him,” said Miss Atwell, as soon as Valerie returned, and she received such a look that she was scared into silence and only mumbled :

“ I thought it was Chinnery.”

The silence frightened her and made her realise that she was acutely unhappy, and after a while she sniffed and said :

“ I feel like a good cry.”

Still no reply came from Valerie, who could not wrench herself out of the enchantment in which the hours with Stephen had left her. This coarse, greedy woman who shared her room seemed to have nothing to do with her except as an oddity which this strange England had projected into her existence. Perhaps that was why Miss Atwell was crying, because she knew that something had happened to undermine the security in which she had been basking.

“ Who is he ? ” asked Miss Atwell. “ What does he do ? Has he any money ? ”

Valerie would not answer.

“ You haven’t anybody but me to ask questions,” said Miss Atwell pathetically and apologetically.

“ Mind your own business, you old hag ! ” cried Valerie in a sudden fury, and she bounced out of the room and banged the door.

“ My ! ” said Miss Atwell, folding her hands on her lap. “ My ! What a temper ! Well, I’m only thankful I’m not your mother, young lady. I’m not old either, I’m as young as ever I was.”

With that she drew up to the fire, and with a bottle of stout and a glass on the mantelpiece, sat eating the fried fish she had brought in for her supper and ruminating over her chances. Her new engagement was to begin a fortnight hence, and to make her impression on the American Jew,

her employer, she would need the free run of Valerie's wardrobe, purse and credit.

She need not have been alarmed. Valerie was in a mood to give away everything she possessed, for material things had become worthless to her.

## §

IN fact, Miss Atwell very soon found that she had only to help herself, so did Freda Carruthers, who also required garments with which to make an impression. Valerie was unconcerned. Her one thought was for Stephen. She knew that he was ill and cold, and froze everything with which he came in contact. . . . She had become aware of that during their ecstasy. He froze everything into an idea before he could admit its existence: to be doing that he must have been terribly hurt or cruelly starved. Something of that she knew herself, for she, too, had been hurt into numbness, so that she became estranged from the life all around her, and had to scramble along with mental images, with her imagination hammering away at them to try to beat them into life, while all the time in her heart she cried to those who loved her: "I love you, I love you, but don't you see that I am trapped and wounded and cannot move?" . . . She could understand him, and there would have been some satisfaction in falling in with his desire that he had expressed in his "I must not, I cannot, I will not, see you again." But that would mean that they would both for ever remain numbed, frozen, watching life go by.



Their hours together had made that impossible. Life was remote from them still, but from another reason, that it was going on in time while they were living in eternity. Perhaps, through suffering, they had always lived there, each in a terrible cold solitude to which life was hardly more than an exasperation: spectators both, who knew perfectly well what was going on in life, but could never make themselves audible to those engaged in it, so that they had to watch them lying, deceiving and being deceived, swindling and being swindled, drifting to ruin, old age and death. . . . But now gaiety and colour were released: there was no longer any confusion between ideas and living things, and Valerie was almost perturbed to find that she had broken her old habit of living so perfectly in her imagination that it was a matter of indifference whether the reality followed. She could no longer lie in her bed dreaming of all the wonderful things she was doing until night came to remind her that she had left everything undone. Still, though the habit was broken, action was so unaccustomed as to be painful, and only to be endured because of the responsibilities she had accepted—for her two exiles, Stephen Lawrie and Mr. Perekatov.

## §

BEFORE she saw Stephen again Mr. Perekatov called on her. He came heavily stumping up the stairs and was introduced, as he had insisted, by the grubby little maid who emerged from the bowels

of the earth. Miss du Toit was a lady, and he stood upon ceremony. His huge paw closed round her hand very tenderly and he bent and kissed it. Then he sat very close to her and never took his eyes from her face. His glasses were mended.

Most earnestly he said :

"I was terribly drunk. I want to know if I said anything. I must know."

"Nothing at all," said Valerie. "Nothing that anybody heard."

"But you heard."

"Nothing. I assure you, nothing. You thought I was some one else."

"You know, sometimes, when I am drunk—not often—I say terrible things, even things that I will not say to myself—and what I think of everybody."

"There was nothing—nothing," Valerie reassured him. "You broke your glasses."

"It is the first time in my life that I lost consciousness," said Mr. Perekatov, profoundly apologetic. "I remember nothing at all; only a desire that people should stop making beasts of themselves because of what is happening in Russia. The whole world should stop and listen and try to help when they are asked to help."

"Something like that happened in my country when I was born," said Valerie. "A great, a terrible tragedy, but no one paid any attention."

"I think they did," said Mr. Perekatov. "When the Boers were defeated the conscience of the whole world was stirred for the first time. I remember it even in Russia, even in my little village,

It was the beginning of everything that has happened since. I think in Russia we could not have moved without it: the first crumbling of earth that foretold the landslide. But you are reconciled now."

"Never," said Valerie. "Never."

"There is something in you," continued Mr. Perekatov, "I was afraid you were only here out of spite and impatience. I see you are here because you could not bear to wait in your own country. One must have patience, but it is hard when you know what must happen. I could not bear to wait for the Revolution in Russia because I knew it must come, and days went by and it did not come. Personal affairs matter so little to those who can feel. What one cannot bear is to see swindlers making their profit out of great events."

"Are you an artist?" asked Valerie.

"I am an honest Jew," replied Mr. Perekatov.

Again he took Valerie's small strong hand in his hairy paw, bowed over it, and rolled away. He was reassured. He had said nothing in his drunkenness to desecrate his deepest feelings, and here in this child he had found something akin to his own spirit, the same refusal to accept either persons or events until they had been shaped and made definite by the fruitful forces of life.

"She is a character that girl, and England is too soft for her."

As he walked home—he lived not very far away—he contrasted the soft, moist air that blurred and distorted everything, with the keen, fierce light of his home in the Ukraine, and again with the hot



sunshine to which Valerie was accustomed, whose warmth in her made her so vivid and radiant.

As he approached his house he saw Stephen waiting for him, an altered Stephen, almost idiotic with happiness.

"I came to see if you were all right," said Stephen.

Mr. Perekatov looked at him :

"Why do you lie?" he said. "You came to brag."

Stephen gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Nothing to brag about," he muttered.

"I have been to see Miss du Toit," said Mr. Perekatov. "She has a force, that girl."

"What do you know about her?" asked Stephen.

"She will break in you everything that is breakable. There is a need of such women. For the rest, let them be flogged."

Mr. Perekatov stood in the gateway of his house and made no attempt to admit Stephen, but stood taking his measure, the man who had never suffered, the man who was blind to his own quality, and in true English fashion was letting his powers and the immense privileges of his traditions waste away, because he was simply concerned with being happy, letting his emotions flower in him and die because he had no means of communicating the beauty of them to his fellows, and acquiescing in their habit of being ashamed of beauty, of passion, of everything that gave character and colour to life, only different from them in having substituted a grey mental existence for their drab physical being. Mr. Perekatov knew that he was incapable of realising what

was happening to him, and was filled with a fury of disgust.

"My God," he groaned inwardly. "How stupid the English are! But how adorably stupid! If I were a woman I could only love an Englishman, because they are virgin soil."

Stephen was uncomfortably aware of the hostility in his friend, but could make nothing of it. For a moment or two he half-imagined that Valerie might have discussed him, but he knew that she could no more talk about him than he could about her.

"I—I wanted to talk to you," he said at last.

"Get out," roared Mr. Perekatov exasperated with the fool. What had he to talk about into whose hands life had dropped its rarest treasure? Oh! the English were all alike. Life gave them everything and they did not know what to do with it, but must for ever do things as their fathers and grandfathers did them, content merely to make a livelihood.

Stephen was stirred into revolt against Mr. Perekatov's injustice, but could not become articulate, yet the stirring made him miserably aware that, everything that had happened having come about through contact with the Russian's vitality, he had come for more of it. He began to perceive that Mr. Perekatov was justifiably enraged, and to realise how top-heavy he was, and how ludicrously unfitted for the great adventure into which he had stumbled. He did not get out, but stood waiting on the pavement for Mr. Perekatov to relent. At last the Russian said dryly with his heavy emphasis:

"I will tell you one thing. The spirit of England is dead. How do I know? Because her revolutionaries, when they are not swindlers, are like deacons in a nonconformist chapel—and what is more, a chapel that has no congregation."

"That's true enough," replied Stephen, stung into asperity. "But what the hell has that got to do with me?"

"If you cannot find that out," said Mr. Perekatov, "you had better go back to your Frenchwoman and let her keep you. The sluggish English and the torpid French. Life isn't a joke, my friend."

"I never thought it was," replied Stephen tartly.

"Didn't you? You are like a man who has been told a funny story and cannot sleep for trying to see the point of it."

"That's enough," said Stephen. "I don't want to quarrel with you. I hate quarrelling."

"It is a pity," rumbled Mr. Perekatov.

"I won't quarrel with you, and I won't expose my entrails for your scrutiny in your beastly Russian fashion, but let me tell you that you are fatally, completely, and abysmally wrong, as only a Russian could be who entirely misunderstands Europe——"

"And Stephen Lawrie," added Mr. Perekatov neatly.

Stephen went purple in the face with rage. Something in him snapped, and Mr. Perekatov turned quickly and went into his house. He had procured the result he desired.



## §

STEPHEN could hardly walk straight, so outraged was he with the impertinence of Mr. Perekatov—with his eternal psychology.

“I’ll just show him,” he kept on muttering to himself—“I’ll just show him that I haven’t kicked against things all my life for nothing. . . . What nonsense! What utter nonsense! The man’s a savage, an absolute savage. Just see how wrong he is, and how filthy with his disgusting assumption about Mlle. Donnat! Really, I’ve a good mind never to see him again, and how dare he—how dare he discuss Valerie du Toit?”

The mere idea of Valerie was enough to make him break into a run, and his legs did not stop until they had brought him to her door with its shabby, dirty, cracked brown paint. What a ridiculous door! How could she live beyond it up those ominous dark stairs?

As he stood contemplating the door he heard footsteps behind him, and Björnson came up with his play in his hand.

“Mr. Lawrie,” he said, “my play! Will you read?”

Stephen found the typescript in his hands before he had time to say a word.

“It is a great play,” said Björnson. “I wrote it. I want to make syndicate to produce. Valerie——”

This was more than Stephen could stand—that this dirty, flimsy creature out of the gutter, this

sweeping of a studio floor, should call Valerie by her Christian name ! And in a sudden fury he rolled up the typescript and hit Björnson across the face with it. The dramatist stood still, as though he were expecting more, and Stephen heard a titter of applauding laughter, and across the road saw Freda Carruthers and Charles sitting in a car. He hurled the typescript away. Björnson picked it up, ran over to the car, and Freda, who was driving, touched the accelerator and they disappeared round the corner.

Stephen pulled at the bell until it rang and rang again. What had hurt him most was the impresson that Björnson was used to being thrashed, and even enjoyed it. Confusedly he thought Valerie was to blame, and as he walked up the stairs he raged against her.

His rage, however, disappeared immediately he saw her, for he felt entirely helpless. Hitherto such relations as he had had with women had been based on a chivalry that amounted almost to hysteria. Here at once he had to admit that Valerie was stronger than himself. Since their hours together so much had happened that the interval seemed like many lifetimes. That consuming ecstasy could never be repeated. As soon as he saw her all his hesitation vanished, and he was filled with a boundless smiling confidence and the strength of a giant. She was in his arms, and her arms held him in a strong embrace, and their lips were together so that they became physically one being, endowed with a force that seemed to raise them out of life altogether. There was neither

shock nor surprise in them, and her whole being murmured thankfulness.

When the virtue had gone out of their embrace they parted. There was no greed in either, because there was no uncertainty.

He told her how he had hit Björnson across the face.

"Everybody beats Björnson," she said. "There is a painter who comes to the studio sometimes. He gets terribly drunk and whenever Björnson speaks he thrashes him. And Björnson speaks to make him do it. . . . How can people be so degraded?"

"There's thoroughness about that, anyhow," said Stephen. "How do you come to know such people?"

"They are friends of Freda's."

"How did you come to know her?"

She told him.

"I wanted to be free. I had to be free. You know, something terrible happened."

"Will you tell me?"

"I can't. . . . Not now. I'm too happy."

He could not avoid telling her about Mr. Perekatov.

"You know," he said, "I can't help feeling that he is somehow angry with me for not being something that he wants me to be. I'm not sure what it is, but these Russians are always looking for a Messiah, a Saint, and trying to create him. Dostoevsky tried with Alyosha, but had to give it up. They're very primitive, and they don't understand that we have grown out of all that."



"I think he only wants you to be what you are," said Valerie.

"And what's that?"

"A lovely man."

He was so to her. There was neither sickness nor coldness left in him. He was tingling with vitality and taut as steel with passion. The film of sorrow had gone from his eyes, and he moved with the grace and poise of an athlete, and movement gave him—and her—so much pleasure that as he talked he walked up and down the room, sometimes stopping to look out of the window at the view that was so inappropriate with its church spire and dingy roofs and chimneys.

She liked best of all to hear him talk of himself as a boy, and she often interjected:

"Oh! I wish I had known you."

And when he told her of all the absurd mistakes he had made, she said:

"I would never have let you be so foolish."

He could not feel that he had been foolish, since everything in his life had led to this meeting and everything that he had rejected had left him free for it. Even if it were so it was not worth thinking about now, when at last he had surrendered.

He could not nor did he wish to form any image of Valerie. Now she seemed like a little girl, now like some pure blinding beauty, now the most charming companion; and again a passion that swept round and in and through him. When she talked of her life at home her charm was so enthralling that he could hardly bear it, for the waves of delight that went rushing through his veins. Her voice

as she talked played upon and caressed him, and as she told of the people at home he choked with pride and pleasure in the love that had been lavished on her.

The history of her people thrilled him. Descendants of French Huguenots, they had always been refugees, aristocrats of the spirit retiring before the rising flood of vulgar prejudice and ambition. Her forbears had been with Piet Retief in the Great Trek to found in God's Name a true republic, and they had settled and made a good life until the English came with their machines. After that were only ruin, violence, corruption and tragedy.

"Yes," said Valerie, "tragedy, and in Africa we do not do things by halves. If it is done at all it is well done. The English did not beat us, but we could not go on for ever, and now they have made it impossible to live. Nothing but money and marriage. Among my people it is the woman who does everything. Go on any farm and it is always a woman. But on a mine, what can a woman do?"

"What do you think you can do in England?" asked Stephen.

"That depends on you," she said. "If you want to do anything we will do it, but if you don't then we will go to my country, where there is room to be alone."

"I should have thought there was that everywhere."

"That is where you are wrong. It is impossible to live here without being reminded that people all round you are sick and poor and starving. In

my country if life is finished you can sit in the sun until you die."

"Is life ever finished?" asked Stephen.

"Oh yes! For many, very many, it is finished quite soon. They have suffered all they can suffer and can do no more. I thought I was like that."

"You?"

"Yes. That was why I came to England to find you."

"Did you know then?"

"Yes; I knew that I should find you. Didn't you expect to find me?"

"I knew that something tremendous was going to happen to me. That was why I could do nothing and accept nothing. It has been a long time—waiting."

"Was there nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't people love you?"

"No. I don't think they did. People thought I was unhappy and tried to make me happy. They were wrong. I don't think I was ever unhappy."

"Why do you smile?"

"I was thinking of the people who have tried to make me happy."

Valerie looked scornful.

"Tried!" she said as if it were inconceivable that any one should attempt so immense a task without being certain of success. She explained herself:

"You don't try," she said. "You either do it at once or not at all. When it comes to trying it is time to say good-bye."



"But I always was happy—in myself, whatever happened. People drifted in and out of my life without making any difference, until at last I was alone."

"You don't know what you are talking about," said Valerie brusquely. "You have never lived."

"There was always plenty of time," muttered Stephen a little apologetically.

"Time! Time has nothing to do with it."

"I was always waiting for something—for you, I suppose."

That pleased Valerie. He was beginning to wake up, though he seemed still to be straining over the past to account for the inadequacy of himself.

"It doesn't matter," said Valerie.

"What doesn't?"

"Everything that has been."

Half convinced he said:

"I suppose so, but it seems very strange that what I looked for in my own people should have come through you and Perekatov."

"Aren't you pleased?"

"Oh, very! But I want everybody to share it."

"How could they?"

"I don't know. I'm absurd. When I woke up this morning I really felt that the mews behind my room had become a garden full of delphiniums and larkspurs. All the flowers were blue, and the bees were very busy. The birds were singing like mad. Blackbirds and thrushes and linnets. . . ."

"In my country," said Valerie, "the birds do not sing and the flowers have no scent. The sun is too fierce for things like that."

Stephen felt suddenly ashamed, and had a sharp twinge of fear and almost of dislike of her. She dismissed so many things that had been precious to him, and when as now, it came to the point, he had to admit that birds and flowers and the charm of a garden made things too easy. An emotion in England could too lightly find an outlet. There were always birds to sing and flowers to tremble for love's ecstasy.

"You're wrong," he cried. "I have always been in revolt against that."

"Revolt!" said Valerie. "What do you know of revolt in this country where you have policemen and soldiers keeping down people like us all over the world, while you go to sleep, with your birds and bees and flowers making a charming lullaby. Sleep, baby, sleep! My mother was quite right when she said Englishmen were all babies."

"You are only a baby yourself," said Stephen, beginning to be exasperated: "a spoilt baby."

Valerie flamed into a fury.

"Go out!" she cried. "Go out!"

And to her surprise he went.

She clapped her hands and danced about; she had made him lose his temper, and she knew that he was suffering from general suppression and needed just that.

He was back again in half an hour, but she would not speak to him. She had taken up a volume of Shakespeare and was reading *The Tempest*.

He could be obstinate—no one more so—and he sat silently. At last, to avoid bursting into laughter, she said:

"Well, are you going to beg my pardon?"

"Beg *your* pardon? It is you who ought to beg mine."

Valerie stared at him. She was used to being slavishly obeyed.

"You were very rude to me," she said.

"But consider how rude you were to me—and to my country."

"Oh, if you are a Jingo—but I thought you were a rebel."

What little was left of his temper vanished. He leaped a surprising height in the air, kicked his chair over, and paced to and fro storming inwardly, unable to find a single word.

Valerie hugged herself in mischievous glee, as at last he burst forth:

"What do you want? What do you expect? I'm in love with you. I love you."

She could only just restrain a scream of delight.

"You taunt and tease and twitter at me. You don't know, you can't know the agony I am in. You make me feel absolutely a stranger to you, and I can't bear it."

"No one is asking you to stay if you don't like it."

Stephen could not follow her. She was too quick for him, yet he knew, as he had never known anything in his life, that she had a purpose, and that, if she was capricious, it was to disguise it. It was the strength of purpose in her that bound him. He chafed against it too, for he wanted her to surrender as he had done, in good English fashion,



to love; but even that she was bending to her purpose.

"There is no resisting you, or the force in you," he said at last.

"Do you know," she said with her disconcerting irrelevance, "I think I was meant to be a sculptress? When you were leaping about like a mule I kept trying to mould your head. . . . Feel my hands, how strong they are!"

"Very well then. I'll get you some clay."

He would not touch her hands. To hold them, shattered as he was by his outburst of temper, would be like holding the two handles of an electric battery.

"Oh, all right!" she said. "You don't want me. You want a nice domestic English girl, who will adore you and say 'Yes, Stephen' and 'No, Stephen,' and never understand a word you say."

"Do stop teasing me and tell me what you want."

"A pearl necklace, a motor-car, and a munition coat."

"Don't be fantastic. Come down to reality if you can."

"Meaning by reality?"

"What we had that first night."

She flung out her hand to him, saying:

"I forgive you."

He wanted to protest that it was he who was in the position to forgive, but once again they were caught up in that ecstasy which in its purity rejects all forms of life, but now there was in it a fierce heat so intense that consciousness was swept away. To

bear it they must become one in absolute submission until at last life seemed to give a great sigh and to release them, letting them sink back slowly and by imperceptible gradations into recognition once more of themselves and their surroundings. . . .

After that they were incapable of thought. For a week they lived in entire oblivion. Stephen went away in the early hours of the morning, slept in his rooms, ate the breakfast prepared for him by Mlle. Donnat, saw, heard, felt, was aware of nothing but Valerie, to whom he returned before she was up in the morning. They were reluctant to emerge, could not, in fact. Her letters like his lay unopened. After he came in the morning the door was locked. They bought food when they thought of it, which was not often. . . . Occasionally they tried to read, but nothing that had been written seemed to be in the least relevant, and their intimacy was so complete that there was no need of words.

“ Valerie ! ”

“ Stephen ! ”

These were the only words that were positive and absolute enough, and sometimes he would say :

“ Do you know that I am your husband ? ” and she would answer :

“ Do you know that I am your wife ? ”

Smiling one day, he said :

“ We have run away. ”

She was suddenly and violently alert on that.

“ Yes. ” He said. “ We have run away and are never going to come back. ”

"No," she said.

Dreamily he thought that she was acquiescing. He had not caught the note of hard defiance in her voice.

"No!" she repeated.

This time he caught it and was alarmed.

"I'm young," she said. "I'm going to live. I thought I was going to die, but I'm going to live—I'm going to live."

Suddenly he was acutely wretched.

"You are too good," she said. "You have never seen evil in any one because it is not in yourself. You can't even begin to understand me. No one has ever tried to destroy you because they know at once that it is impossible. You can hide away in your mind, where they cannot get at you."

She was sitting up, with her head thrown back, looking savage and terrible. He realised for the first time what a wild creature she was.

"Have you ever seen an old woman try to destroy a young one?"

He shook his head. He had always idealised women.

"All my life," she went on, "people have clung to me, borrowed from me. I have been in this country three months. Do you know why I am here in these rooms—pretending, trying to be poor? I'm hiding away from a woman, an old woman who will not be content until she has broken me: a woman who thinks that every man she sees is in love with her, and hates my being young. There was a soldier on the voyage who was in love with me, and because of that as soon as we landed she



shut me up with her and drank so that it would be impossible for anybody to come near the place. And I could not move. The horror of it fascinated me. At night she would come to the foot of my bed and weep and roar or boast of the terrible things she had done in her life. She was very strong and terribly quick, and cunning, and she was romantic. Through it all the maudlin, romantic mind of a girl of sixteen. That was when she began—at sixteen, and her mind has never grown at all since then. I hated her at first, but when I realised that I was sorry for her : all that ferocious vitality and no mind in it at all. . . . And when it was over she was up and about as fresh as paint, when I was nearly dead, because I had had to think for her all the time. No one knows, no one would ever dream : and she wanted to make me as evil as herself.”

Valerie brought her head down and looked across at Stephen who was stunned and dazed with the shock of this horror coming so hard upon their time of illumination. It had eased Valerie to speak of it, and she brushed it from her thoughts, while for Stephen it clung and writhed about in his imagination, which refused to accept the appalling picture of his beauty, tortured and imperilled by such monstrous evil.

“ But why . . . but why didn't you run away ? ” he asked at last.

“ I do not run away,” said Valerie proudly, and he knew why she had told him because of his insistence upon their having run away. She continued : “ When a thing is over, or a phase of it is past,

you can move. But while it is raging you must see it through."

"I think I know what you mean," he said humbly; "just to see that it doesn't fizzle out."

He was aware of forces in himself pumping to find their way through to his mind. Every nerve in him was taut, every instinct crouched to pounce on this evil that had threatened, and was still threatening, his beloved since the memory of it could weigh on her so heavily. And soon these forces made their way through and ran along his nerves, giving him the acutest pain, followed by an exultation that made him want to shout. The facts of his own life, upon which he had been brooding, fell away, so idiotic and trivial they were compared with the passionate will that here had so bravely squared up to evil.

"You are more glorious than ever," he said. "Where is she now?"

"In France," replied Valerie. "Nursing soldiers. . . . You look wonderful, Stephen."

"I am not going to run away," he said.

"No. But I shall."

"Oh no, you won't! You are mine now."

"Not at all." She smiled at him. "I used to say when I was a child that I should never marry. I did not know how true it was. I shall just go back to the farm and sit on the kopje like one of the stones. There is a stone that looks like a woman brooding because life could give her nothing that could satisfy her."

"You mustn't talk like that," he said. "You—so young, with all life before you."

"I have had you," she insisted. "I don't want any more. There is neither before nor behind. Why should we go on and dwindle away into life as it is lived?" . . .

"Your drunken woman has become to me a symbol of the war, an evil that has to be faced. I have been like that too. Unable to move because of a fixed will to resistance. It isn't the physical horror, but the evil will behind it. I never understood that until now. . . . No, of course we can't make plans. We shall be just you and I as long as anything is."

"We have both a good deal to do in the world," said Valerie. "It may not always be the same thing."

"It will always be," insisted Stephen.

"I don't think so. We are neither of us alone in the world."

"There is no one to whom I owe the smallest debt."

Valerie shook her head.

"And you?" he asked.

"I have a debt to pay that was contracted before I was born."

"Where?"

"It may be at home, it may be here in London. I don't know. . . ."

"I implore you. Make no mysteries. Leave that to women."

"Am I not a woman?"

"God knows what you are. I love you."



## §

It was difficult for either of them to grope back into life, so empty was it of anything that mattered to either of them. Valerie had seen practically nothing of London, and it was a great joy to Stephen to reveal the life of the city to her, subdued and suppressed though it was with its streets darkened at night, the museums closed or denuded, and the places of public resort degraded to meet the needs of the temporary population. He showed her the Temple, where he had lived when he first came to London, and the river from Chelsea to the Docks which he used to haunt, and she would take no interest in any part of London that had not its association for him. She loved that young, ardent, and very foolish Stephen, with his head full of dreams and his heart of illusions. This carried them through their more difficult time, and so absorbed Stephen, as he fumbled through his life to pick up the threads he had let drop, that he had no thought of what was to come for either of them. Only then did he realise how completely he had been exiled from the life of this city which from his earliest days had been a dream to him, not of conquest: but of tradition. He had come to London to meet, not the living, but the great dead: Shakespeare, Jonson, Fielding, Swift, Dickens. These to him were the real Londoners, these the men of whom he talked to Valerie as though they were alive, and these, too, he soon found, were what she had come to seek in England, and he was often astonished at

the freshness of her knowledge of them, looking at them as she did from the outside and comparing their spirit with that of her own race.

"I was astonished," she said. "When I came to England to find that the English knew nothing about them. And when I asked to see Shakespeare there was not one theatre where his plays were performed."

Continually during this pious pilgrimage Stephen found his whole thought suddenly and violently concentrated in one word :

"Work !"

And sometimes unconsciously he spoke it aloud. Then Valerie would laugh at him and ask him what work he had ever done.

"Precious little," he said. "Precious little. There was nothing to work for. We were all waiting for some big thing to happen, a great and miraculous change. Everything was postponed, put off, until the crash came."

"Why aren't you in it? . . . But I'm glad you're not."

"It has been like your drunken woman. I couldn't move. . . . I'm not a man of action. I make a mess of it whenever I try. I have ignored the army and the army has ignored me."

"Would you have gone?"

"I can't say. I certainly should not now."

"Because of me?"

"Not entirely. No. Not at all. Because it is all over and is only going on by its mechanical momentum. I don't mind surrendering, if I must,

to an evil will, but I will certainly not become an automaton."

The people she saw in the streets made her suffer acutely, so listless they were and so characterless.

"I hate the people," she said. "They can never be anything but a mob. Why don't they do something? Or do they like being swindled and starved?"

And again she would say:

"I would like to have the handling of London. A woman who knew what she wanted could do as she liked. The people who matter must be very few."

"If there are any," said Stephen. "It is just a great sprawling mass, quite helpless. Millions of people who must agree or they won't get their bacon in the morning. They are too easily frightened."

"Oh yes! They are afraid now, but when they are no longer afraid?"

"Then they will be tired and stupid."

"All the easier," said Valerie, "to do as you like with them, if you really like it."

## §

CHINNERY, like the rest of the world, had been told that Miss du Toit was away, and he had been unable to find Stephen. Great, then, was his excitement when one day, on coming out of the National Gallery with Björnson, whom he had cultivated in case he might one day really become a great dramatist, he saw Stephen and Valerie



walking across by the Y.M.C.A. kiosk in Trafalgar Square.

"By Jove!" he said. "There's Valerie du Toit."

"I hate her," said Björnson.

"I think she's terrific!" cried Chinnery on his highest tenor note.

"That Lawrie is no damn good," growled Björnson, and he tried in vain to hold Chinnery back. That enthusiast shook him off and ran across Trafalgar Square, shouting:

"Hi! Hi! Hi! Valerie! Hi! Lawrie!"

"Good God!" grunted Stephen. "Look who's coming! What a pity they've dried the fountain."

"You wouldn't throw him in?" said Valerie.

"I would," said Stephen. "At sight. Didn't he dare to propose to make you a cinema star?"

"But suppose I had had to make my living. He couldn't know that I wasn't like Chris."

"If he couldn't he is a bigger fool, if possible, than I take him for."

Chinnery reached them breathless.

"I *am* glad to see you, child. I've got everything fixed up. The film people have got their tongues out waiting for you. . . . I say, you are looking bonny! Have a good time?"

His eyes searched Stephen with a cunning look of calculation that did not escape Valerie.

"Perfect weather this. I'm just dying for a honeymoon. Can I come and have tea with you one day soon?"

Through Stephen Valerie was now better able to place these London people. Talk about Stephen

being detached! He was most passionately engaged in the life of this city, but Chinnery was uprooted and had no place in it at all.

"You're not going to let me down?" he said, and, turning to Stephen, he added:

"I'm glad you're looking so much better, sir."

"Why sir?" thought Stephen.

"I've been talking to the film people about you too. They're desperately hard up for men, you know, especially a man who can look like a gentleman. The screen's a terrible show-up, you know."

"I think propaganda is more in my line," said Stephen with a twinkle and an ironic twist of the lip.

"Not much in that nowadays," said Chinnery, turning from the films to politics without the smallest mental effort. "The Government's got the wind up and is closing all the halls. I shall do something desperate. I really shall. I shall read some of my pamphlets in the street. I've done everything I can to make them run me in, but they won't do it. Frightened of making too many martyrs."

The idea of Chinnery as a martyr was too much for Stephen's equanimity and he broke into a good-humoured laugh, which made Chinnery stare in amazement. It had been a rare thing to hear Stephen Lawrie laugh, and when he did it was painful in the extreme, so dry and harsh and strained was it. . . . Chinnery looked from Stephen to Valerie and from Valerie to Stephen, and after gasping for a moment or two he made his excuses and decamped.

He told Björnson of the impression he had gleaned.

They looked at each other and slow thoughts began to move in their brains. They turned together and watched Stephen and Valerie, who were moving slowly in the direction of St. James's Park.

"There's something about Stephen Lawrie," said Chinnery. "He's different."

"He's a damn scoundrel," said Björnson.

"Oh rot!" muttered Chinnery, who had seen that a new fact had come into existence, though he could not yet see his advantage in it. His deepest impression was that Stephen and Valerie were somehow important. He was afraid of them, but could not resist the desire to exploit them. He knew nothing whatever of the London in which they lived. London to him was the West End, and his dream was to see its walls plastered with the words: "Mr. Chinnery presents . . ." Even less was he capable of imagining the inner necessity which had driven Stephen and Valerie into the strange company in which they met. As he drifted himself so he believed did every one else. Some had luck and some had none, and either way the world was continually charming. He believed that Valerie had luck.

## §

THE meeting with Chinnery had the effect of filling Stephen with a sudden alarm for Valerie. At first he regarded it as rather absurd. What



harm could there be in Chinnery? And as for Valerie there was nothing that she could not go through unstrengthened. . . . Then he realised that he was fearful of himself and saw that he had been leaning on her, worshipping almost idolatrously her beauty and her force. That he had ignored the facts of existence was nothing. He had almost deliberately ignored something in her.

Their time together had been pure song, into which days and nights had melted; but now he knew that she was in deadly peril, though he could not divine the nature of it. So dazzling was the beauty of her spirit that he hardly ever saw more of her actual being than the first impression of gold and sunlight she had made on him. He had to make an effort of memory to know that she was sometimes deadly pale, and that there were moments when her eyes were sunk deep in her head, so deep, indeed, that at times there were dark hollows between her cheekbones and her eyes. The contrast between such appearances and her vivacity was so great as to make them incredible; but as his memory began to work again, he was forced to remember that there had been spasms of acute pain, as across the brightness of their joy there came dark shadows that could only come from some deep injury to her imagination. The contrast with her ignorance and innocence was acute, and made him see her as she was, a being so untouched and so simple that she could not understand that others were not like herself, obedient to deep impulse and brave in facing the consequences. . . . He discovered that to her this

London that he displayed was a show in which people were pretending, playing different parts as she, in her solitude, had played them, and she seemed half to expect that soon, very soon, they would get tired of playing and return to the sober earnest of life. . . . Only that could account for her tolerance. Of course, she must be expecting at any moment that liars would become truthful, thieves honest, and women full, like herself, of active love.

He had not to wait long for his real awakening. It was brought about by no incident. He found himself simply looking at life without attempting to explain it, or to account for anything that happened, and he was stretched in an agony from which there was no relief, and he desired none. For him now there was no life except through Valerie, and the smooth organised existence of urban England had given him no equipment for it. What did he know of the earth or the wind or the sun or of the storms that draw up all Nature into themselves and burst in a vast and futile fit of temper? Yet to know Valerie he must know these, to love her he must love them, for this was no *Lalage*, *dulce ridentem*, *dulce loquentem*. . . . What a mockery she made of scholarship, of learning, of intellect, of civilisation itself, if that could be called civilisation which had crashed into the bloody squalor of the battlefields. . . . He cursed himself for an idiot that he could not understand the little she chose to tell him of herself.

This agony began as they sat in St. James's Park, outwardly happy, unconcerned, oblivious,

and he could tell her nothing of it, for words as he had been accustomed to use them had become ridiculous and inadequate, and he knew, too, that the facts of her existence could give him no clue to her. They were but as dust carried along by the wind of her spirit, simply not affecting it at all.

He was glad of the sudden change, for it brought him nearer to her, and made him as tolerant as herself, though he had not yet her passionate sense of responsibility that engaged her to see to the farthest end of everything that touched her, even though she could foretell it. He saw, too, that she was what he had never really been, creative; and that she was working on and shaping himself. Seeing that he was filled with a blind jealousy of everything else that had, however slightly, engaged her attention.

He turned to find her staring at him with her penetrating eyes, and knew that she was perfectly aware of what was taking place within him. The last vestiges of fear for her vanished from his mind and his only dread was lest he should fail her, as he most certainly would if he tried to understand her from anything external, her appearance, her actions, her moods, or even her thoughts.

She said :

"If you were not what I thought I should kill you."

"What do you want me to be?"

"What you are."

He accepted that she would kill him as the most natural thing in the world. After the love they



had shared any betrayal of it, however slight, would be worse than death. Indeed, life outside the wonder they had created seemed so fantastic as to be a continual desecration : soldiers, battles, exhortations to patriotism, food queues, revolution in Russia—all seemed like incidents in a stage play ; the capricious movements of the crowd and the incidental characters surrounding the drama of passions which knew their object and would attain them or destroy.

He protested a little faintly :

“ But I don’t ask you to be anything but what you are.”

“ I am what I am,” said Valerie firmly.

It gave his ironical sense some satisfaction to think that when the passion of the people had burst forth in a frenzy of destruction, his should wait until it could find an object of love, and then fly to it with a swiftness in which there was more than a hint of defiance. Why, he was far more an exile in England than Mr. Perekatov ! . . . It flattered him for a moment to think so, but, then, he began to doubt even that.

“ I’m glad you’re not a talker,” said Valerie.

“ I was only thinking,” he answered. “ How extraordinarily charming everything is ! ”

Indeed, the more intense his agony became, the more sensible he was of the beauty of the world. He could imagine nothing more delicious than the grey London light tinged to ruddiness by the afternoon sun, softening the form of trees and buildings and making the sky as delicate in its hues as the downy breast of a pigeon.

He told Valerie what he was feeling and used that image.

"Don't mention pigeons," she cried. "They are terribly unlucky."

"I'm not superstitious," he said, trying to soothe her real alarm, and at the same time to disguise from her the fact that the weakness in her had given him a loophole for understanding, but she knew at once that he was keeping something from her and she asked him what it was.

"I can't explain," he said. "Somehow to-day has not been like other days."

"How is it different?"

"I am nearer to you. This is something more than love."

She put out her hand and shook him, smiling:

"You needn't take things so seriously any more."

For one beautiful moment he understood her with perfect ease. She loved him and rejoiced in his living only through her who could give him all that he had vainly sought, youth, beauty, courage; and also she knew how hard it would be for him, and was determined to keep from him everything that could complicate his difficulties. Against that he was in revolt, and then even more against the habit of tight control which made him rebel.

The spectacle he afforded made her laugh only the more, for the dearer he became to her the more comic he was.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked desperately.

"Not at you," she said. "I was thinking of all the English people I have met, shut up in

restraint when they have nothing to restrain. They break loose in my country and they have nothing to release."

"You are making me terribly unhappy."

"Of course," she said. "All the others tried to make you happy."

At that he, too, had to laugh at her precision. Her will went straight to its mark and she could sound what note she liked in him.

Both wished to, but neither could, make plans. External circumstances were entirely unimportant. Of only one thing were both certain, that there must be no running away.

## §

ON the following day Stephen had to go down into the country to see the aunt whose monthly dole kept him alive. She was the only member of his family who had not given him up as hopeless, because she said he had more brains than he knew what to do with and that in time he would learn. Valerie called for him at his rooms with a taxi, packed for him, made a mental note of the state of his clothes and decided that as soon as possible he must be removed from so dreadful a habitation. She was in her gayest mood, and Stephen told her that he was Pierrot, and that she had brought his heart to him.

"We will make our own world," he said. "We can do it. We will make it lovely for everybody."

"Do you think it is as easy as that?" she said. "Don't you realise that every one will hate us?"



“How could they?”

“That is life. Love rouses hate as strong as itself.”

“Let them, then.”

“Ah! that’s better.”

She made him travel first-class, and he complied amusedly. She had the grand manner in everything she did, and when she was not oblivious was contemptuous of democracy. In all things she wanted the best or nothing. The wrench of parting made him know how completely he had surrendered to her. Almost it was as though she had substituted her will for his own. They had arranged that he should be back in four days and that she should meet him. The journey, therefore, was towards and not from her, and it seemed to him as the train sped through the fat Midlands that the journey was but one of many stages. Life had become a travelling towards her, movement as unending as that of the stars.

## §

FOR Valerie the days and nights with him had been a fulfilment. If there were never anything more she would not complain. All her passionate hopes of life had been justified, and those who would have her pitch her ambitions lower were flouted and put to scorn. Her thoughts, as she turned away from the station, were fixed on the moment of his return and beyond it she did not look, nor did she give a single glance backwards. There

was nothing now to fight, for nothing could menace the love which was hers for ever and ever. No evil could touch it, no passion oppose. . . . Except in love human beings, she knew, acted only through jealousy, fear and intrigue, and any mere human opposition could be easily dealt with. She would see to it that Stephen had everything he could desire, and she would make him conscious of desires that were now only latent. . . . She smiled with pleasure as she thought of the pathos of his life crouched in resistance to the evil force of the time. That will to understand in him had kept him for her, and nothing of him had been wasted. And yet how little he understood!

## §

WHEN she returned to her flat she found Miss Atwell waiting for her in a state of alarm.

"Don't go up, ducky," she said. "Don't go up yet. That Ducie boy is there in a terrible state."

Valerie had forgotten his very existence.

"Whatever have you been doing to him?" whispered Chris. "He's been asking me the craziest questions about you and cursing something horrid. I had to tell him that it was no affair of mine, and if ever there was an angel out of heaven, I said, it's Valerie. He groaned something horrible and said if anything happened to you there'd be murder done of everybody who didn't raise a finger to stop it. He frightened me, I can tell you,

but he said I was all right, only he thought Freda Carruthers ought to have her neck wrung. Which I agree. . . .”

Chris was in an extraordinary state. She gasped out her words and fingered at her throat as she spoke. She went on:

“Don’t go up, ducky. Don’t go up. Let him get over it. I never seen such a temper. I won’t let you go up. You run across to the studio and have tea. Freda’s out. I’ll go and keep him quiet and tell him after a bit that he may find you over there. He’s not safe . . .”

Valerie was not afraid, but to gain time she acted on Miss Atwell’s advice and ran over to the studio. She had not counted on so speedy a recoil from the world that had seemed so remote.

The studio was empty, and for once in a way clean, though there hung over it the darkness of the squalor from which it would never be free, but that there was no escaping. It lurked and crept in the most opulent lives: it had writhed up into a menacing fury in the elegant flat she had shared with the wretched violent woman who had been—save the mark—her chaperone, but here, at least, it was frank. There was no maudlin romanticism with which to cover it over, no schoolgirlish yearnings and longings to temper its harshness, and it had with a peculiar concentration that deserted air which brooded everywhere in London, even at its busiest and most noisy. In spite of all the reasons she had for disliking it Valerie was fond of the place. It was more to her than her own flat; for it was associated with that



first encounter with Stephen on the night when Mr. Perekatov broke his glasses.

She clapped her hands at the memory of it and danced about, rejoicing in the big roominess of the place.

Ducie came in and stood watching her. He was gloriously handsome, big and strong, browned with the African sun and tanned with the exposure of camp life in England. He had a fine head, large eyes of a blue so dark that they were almost purple, which blazed ominously as he lowered his head like a bull and swung it from side to side. In his hand he held a bundle of letters.

Valerie danced round on her toes with her arms outstretched and her head thrown back. The very ecstasy of motion, she was perfectly individual, expressing herself in the purest art.

"Stop dancing, you mad thing," said Ducie with an extraordinary grunt of fury.

She stopped dead, looked at him and went on dancing.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" he shouted.

"Not until you speak to me civilly."

"All right."

She stopped. He came over to her and seized her by the hair and forced her head back. She closed her eyes. She felt deliciously safe. Mere brutality could not touch her any more.

"They always say that the Dutch are as treacherous as hell," he said.

"You fool!" she answered sweetly, "to talk of treachery."

"Not one of my letters so much as opened!

Not a word have you written to me. What have you been doing?"

"Dancing," she said.

He let her go, went to the fireplace and burned his letters with a flourish of which he was immediately ashamed, and he stood looking at Valerie as though he were afraid of her, and again he lowered his head and swung it to and fro like a bull with a hunch of his great shoulders.

"Well?" he said.

Valerie had stopped still in the middle of the room. A shaft of light came through the skylight and surrounded her with a glow which emphasised all that was fairy-like and ethereal in her personality. For Ducie she was charmed, a thing maddeningly out of his reach, and the anger grew in him. As it grew there bubbled up in Valerie a feeling of security, something new, unlooked and un hoped for. Brutality had lost its power to fascinate her as it had done from her childhood, when she had been worshipped by men who had always seemed to her like giants sprung straight from the earth, very like the soldiers in the story who sprang up out of a sowing of dragon's teeth. It astonished her, too, to find so much of that quality in Ducie, who had been the first man to talk to her of books and music.

"Well?" he asked again.

"I had forgotten all about you," she said, anxious that he should immediately know the truth.

"Don't lie to me," he growled. "Miss Atwell told me you had been away. Where have you been?"

"But I haven't been away," she protested.

"Miss Atwell said you had."

"Oh well, if you choose to take her word against mine . . ."

She saw that he preferred to believe that she had been away. She had made her protest. It was not worth pursuing an argument.

"Let us have it out now," he groaned.

"There is nothing to have out."

"Yes, there is. You know there is. I believed, you let me believe, that Fate threw us together on the ship."

"Possibly. You have been very important in my life."

"Have been?" His arm jerked up involuntarily as if to ward off a blow.

"And you in mine. I was only a child then."

"You were never a child. I have never thought of you as anything but a spirit, sometimes as an evil spirit, a damned will-o'-the-wisp. You know as well as I do that if it gave you any pleasure I would throw myself under a train."

"It wouldn't."

"I'd rather do that than go through the last few days again. Not hearing from you and then to come and find that you had not even opened my letters!"

He ground his teeth together and stood a tower of angry egoism. She was silent, and could tell him nothing, for it would have been desecration. Her will with which she had battled against evil was now diverted to protection of her love from it.

"I don't care who it is or what it is, I'm not going



to lose you. I've nothing else, do you hear? Absolutely nothing else. I don't believe in what I'm doing. Not a single one of the magnificent lies with which they keep the war going has any meaning for me. I'm not like the rest, just folding up their minds for the duration, because of you, because I love you. You have made me love beauty and joy with every drop of my blood and I have got to go on with this beastliness, and going on with it at its most beastly—because of you. I don't think France can be much worse than camp life here. I'm going on with it because of you, and I can't go on without you. I can't go on, do you hear? Come out of that light. Be human. Tell me you don't want me and I'll go—under a train. For God's sake don't stand there looking like a spirit strayed in from another world. . . . We didn't think things were like this when we were all so happy out there on the blue sea, with the ship plugging through it day by day, and every day a dream."

"I was only a child," said Valerie.

"You were never a child, never. You are the biggest, the strongest, the most vital creature ever made. You never had a child's vision. You always had a complete knowledge of everything, or you could not have stayed with that horrible woman. You would have run screaming away."

He stopped for a moment to concentrate his passion.

"I sweat blood trying to understand you. I'm not a fool. You're like that. You won't let go of a thing until it becomes human again. You had

to see her come to her senses, put on again the appearance she has for ordinary life. You won't shut your eyes, and you won't admit that anything or anybody can be perfectly beastly. You . . . You . . ."

His concentration snapped. Tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"You see," he said, "I can't live without you. I haven't a hope except through you."

Valerie's mind was racing to keep pace with the swiftness of his penetration.

She understood the agony of his position, in the war-machine, yet not of it, and from moment to moment critical of the mentality that operated it. He was not like the others who had signed away their responsibility for their lives. He remained responsible for himself and regarded even more jealously his responsibility for her.

His overwhelming terrible love surrounded her, enveloped her, silenced her, shook her. The pressure of it was so intense that she felt that almost at any moment she must break into a passion of hatred for him. Ah, if she only could! That would be a way out. She would be free then. But Ducie was more than friend or lover to her. He was the only person in this strange country who knew her as she had been at home, as unalterably she was. Without him she would be swept into the unknown and would be lost, unable to bring all the wonder that was growing in her into touch with all that she had loved.

"I didn't mean to be cruel," she said. "And if I was cruel just now it was only to be kind."

She could not help feeling just a little scornful as he mopped at his eyes and grinned sheepishly through his tear stains. How childish men were, and the stronger the more childish!

"You little devil!" he said. "I shall have to pay dearly for this. I broke camp to come up to you. I couldn't stay any longer."

"What will they do to you?"

"C.B., loss of leave and pay, and sent off to France with the first batch."

"It is like a convict," she cried. "Why do you let them do it to you?"

"One man can do nothing."

Apparently he had forgotten all his anger. With her he could forget the misery and torture that he endured among men who had put all thought away and could live only in their appetites. She was to him like water in the wilderness, and from her he could turn neither his eyes nor his desire.

"I never thought of this," he said.

"Of what?"

"Of your living in such a place. It hurts me."

"It isn't where you live, but how you live," she said. "I wanted some place to be my own. When I have done that I can get a better place."

"But I don't understand the people . . ."

"They have never been given a chance. They have always been too poor."

He shouted with laughter.

"Are you going to take on the whole country?"

"I shouldn't mind," she said, shaking her mop



of hair, which from being cut had turned to a tawny gold.

His pride in her was immense.

"You could kill with one stroke," he said. "You often remind me of a young lioness. . . . Will you marry me before I go out?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't believe in it."

"You'd be in a stronger position. I'd promise to make you a widow."

Valerie saw herself in widow's weeds and for a moment the idea tickled her comic sense. Suddenly she turned deadly pale and said:

"Don't. You know I can smell death: a terrible, sweetish smell. Don't you get it?"

"Faugh! Morbid nonsense. I was only joking. We are going to come through. It would take more than a war to stop such love as ours."

"As mine," thought Valerie, escaping into the ecstasy of her secret, from which she could bear to contemplate the hideous memories that tormented her, her father's death crashing suddenly into a life that after tempestuous years had at last seemed to become peaceful, and the haunting horrors of the nursing home in which he had died with none but herself to watch over him.

"What is it?" asked Ducie. "What is it that is always like a black shadow at the back of your mind?"

"The war," said Valerie, speaking almost automatically.

"It has become the condition of existence."

"I don't mean this war. I mean the war at home. Perhaps it is all the same."

"I feel that I can almost laugh at it when I am with you," said Ducie.

"And so can I," thought Valerie, "when I am with Stephen."

"You have made me happy again," he added. "You can so easily do that. We must work like hell to be ready for the great times that are coming, the times we used to talk about on the way over. You can make me what you like. Without you I am nothing. . . . Do you remember the days down at Richmond? How proud I was to show you what England could do, the river, the flowers, and the birds. They don't seem to mind."

"I think they do," said Valerie. "It all seemed mournful and dispirited to me. I'm sure flowers mind. They used to when I was ill at home."

"Queer little devil you are," he said uneasily, and he began to fidget. "You are always slipping away from me," he cried. "No one will ever love you as I do. I tell you if I'm killed over there I'll haunt you. You'll never shake me off, never. I shall always be in your life because you have learned the meaning of love from me."

She had taken her seat on the model-throne, and he came over and stood menacingly above her.

"Don't threaten me," she said, "or you will spoil everything."

"I'm not threatening," he mumbled. "I don't want to interfere with your life in any way. You must find your own way out, I know that. But if

I'm to go through with this war-business I must be certain of you. I must feel that you are there waiting on the other side. If I'm certain of you it won't matter if I die. All the better. I shall love you eternally. . . ."

"And hungrily," thought Valerie, to whom he seemed like a starving man. She knew what his life had been: one long torture of inability to express the passion that was in him. He had been, he was, of a fiercely sensual temper, numbed and agued with suppression, and therefore all the more exultantly had he idealised her youth and her innocence. In the emotions they aroused in him he could for the first time freely express his passion so that he had more left for the rest of his being and doing. Through her it seemed to him that every wonderful thing, art, truth and beauty were attainable.

"It is only through you," he said, "that I believe in God, and I suffer agonies at the thought of all the silly blasphemies of my youth."

There, perhaps by the cunning of instinct, he had her. She was a Catholic by training, convent-schooled, and all her freedom, all her love of beauty could not away with the Heaven and Hell of her childish imagination. Ideas of eternal damnation added to the suffering he endured because of her made her melt towards him. He might go blaspheming to his death. She could no longer be cruel to him; besides, when she had so much it seemed too monstrous that he should have nothing. He only asked that she should be kind, that she should think of him, write to him, promise that



when the nightmare of the war was over he should be able to turn to her.

If she told him that she loved, would not his jealousy distort it into something hideous, into a belief that she had succumbed to the corruption of the life all around her which it was her pride, her painful pleasure to resist? His pleading took shape to her imagination as a bitter cry that she should save his soul. He had no gentleness, no tenderness, no sweet laughter, and it was she who had released him from the prison of his brooding for the torture of desire.

He could feel the return of active sympathy in her, but he wanted more, and, becoming subtle, he said :

"If I come through I won't ask anything of you. I'll give you years if need be to make sure of yourself."

"It isn't a question of time," said Valerie, suddenly radiant, "but of eternity, everything revealed for ever."

He worshipped her and knelt and kissed her feet.

"God ! How beautiful you are ! How beautiful you are !"

He rushed out and came back in a moment with his arms full of flowers. He was in high spirits, and said gaily :

"What a clumsy fool I am ! I should have brought these at once. And we could have defied everything and blasted their ridiculous war to hell. . . . Will you live here ? I'd like to think of you living here, dancing about when you were

happy and sitting as still as a mouse when you were sad."

"I feel that I do live here," said Valerie, "although it frightens me."

"Does anything frighten you?"

"Yes. I know too much. I have suffered too much."

"What a brute I am! I could do the suffering for both of us only——" He caught her roughly by the arms and shook her so that she felt her bones must break. "Only I can't bear the idea of your being happy when I am in hell. Were you happy when you did not read my letters?"

She nodded. His grip tightened until she had to scream, but she would not. When she must be hurt it was her pride not to flinch from a single stab of pain.

"Have you been listening to some lying fool? That Atwell woman was lying. I knew she was lying. Tell me, you devil, tell me."

He forced her down on the model-throne and his hands crept towards her throat. She lay stiff and rigid. At last just as he gripped her the fury in him broke and he burst into a storm of weeping.

"Don't torture me. . . . Don't torture me. . . . You couldn't. . . . You couldn't. . . . I know you couldn't . . ."

Valerie could say nothing. She ran out of the studio and across to her own room, where, before she had time to think, he had followed her.

"We can't go on like this," he said. "It's my fault. I'm a jealous fool, and it's a strain coming back into a decent life after the hell down there."

It makes you feel that every beautiful and decent thing must be crushed out of existence. . . . I'll tell you what. Let us go to a concert. We'll escape from each other and forget. We might—we might even find each other again."

Valerie put on her hat and together they went out. They had to wait for some time on the platform of the underground station. An express train came thundering through. Ducie was standing near the edge of the platform and Valerie pulled him away with a cry of terror, and for some moments she remained staring into the dark tunnel, cold and tense with fear.

"It's so dark," she said at last, but she could not bear to look at him. She had been seized with a vision of him lying broken under the train in the dark tunnel. . . . It was only when the light of the slow train appeared that she could shake it off, and then, for comfort, she took his arm.

## §

THEY stood in the promenade at the Queen's Hall when Ducie, who was deeply musical, lost himself in remembered delights, forgetting that Valerie had no memory of the days when the members of the orchestra were in evening dress, and there were no flags of the Allies to supply a blatant insistence on the material things of life. Now the orchestra looked shabby and decayed. There were gaps here and there: many of the musicians were in khaki, and women sat among



them, destroying their unity and appearance and efficiency. . . . For Valerie, to whom orchestral music was new, these things conveyed nothing. Here was the expression she had always sought; of the wind howling round the kopje, of the moon shining down on the veldt that was wider and more spacious even than the sea, of the gladness of the parched earth after the rains, and she soared on the music until she seemed to hover above all the people, saying to them in a little voice that, alas! they could not hear:

“Go to your homes and be happy for what you seek is in yourselves.”

Ah! if only they could be made to hear her, they would no longer be tortured with misunderstanding, they would send no more young men out to die, they would demand and they would be told the truth and would no longer be so stifled that they could know neither joy nor sorrow, but only a dull expectancy.

Through the music Ducie could understand her. He no longer made demands on her, but was thankful to have her with him.

“After all,” he said, “what life does with you is no great matter. I don’t much believe in either life or death. There is love or nothing—just a kind of dung-heap.”

Valerie did not hear what he said. She had seen Chinnery and he was bearing down on her. She was filled with a sense of disaster, and wanted to scream because it came in such a comic shape. She could do nothing to prevent his coming, although she knew beforehand what he was going

to say. He came up in his effusive manner, and, waving his long hands, said :

"I was looking for you, child. I've fixed up everything for you and Stephen Lawrie."

She felt Ducie's heart almost stop.

"I've written no end of a scenario," chattered Chinnery. "Lawrie is a kind of John the Baptist . . ."

He stopped short. He could not face the withering scorn and rage in Ducie, muttered some excuse and drifted away. The orchestra began to play again, but Valerie could not soar this time. She could only feel unutterably sorry.

As the orchestra stopped Ducie said :

"I've had enough. Let us go."

He took her arm and almost lifted her out of the hall.

"Who is that fuddled fool?" he asked.

"Chinnery. He is a politician. There is no harm in him."

"And who is Stephen Lawrie?"

Her lips were dry and stiff as she stated the fact :

"A man—I met—with Chinnery."

He made an effort to be satisfied, but she knew that he knew and that there was no suppressing his jealousy.

"What's this nonsense about the films?"

"Chinnery thought I could make a lot of money——"

"Where is the swine? I'll break his neck!"

He rushed back into the hall, but Chinnery, who had a fox's instinct for danger, had decamped.

Before Ducie returned Freda Carruthers, Björn-

son and Charles came out of the Hall and joined Valerie in the street.

"Got any money, old thing?" said Freda. "We want to go on to the Café! Coming with?"

Without a word Valerie handed over her purse, and the three inseparables disappeared into the night.

"I shall have to go down by the last train," said Ducie as he returned. "I've only got till réveille."

Valerie knew that he was lying: stupidly at that, since he had come away without leave.

There was nothing to be said. They drove to the station and paced up and down without a word until his train went.

## §

His silence paralysed her. She could do nothing, neither think, nor talk, nor move. Life had stopped until Stephen should return. Chris Atwell came home and chatted, but could get not a word out of Valerie, not a word, and at last, muttering something about two bundles of hay she went off to her bed. Valerie made up the fire and sat curled up in her chair, numbed, at a standstill, waiting. . . . About four in the morning—she heard the church clock chime four through her drowsiness—she went to sleep and awoke to find Chris Atwell standing over her, crying:

"For God's sake, ducky, what is it? . . . You screamed like a soul in hell."

The words brought Valerie's dream back to her



with a shock that made her breathless. She had dreamed that she was lying ill in bed, in a fever, because her head was shaved, and she could not make any one understand what she said; only the flowers by her bedside understood and moved, nodding towards her graciously, oh, so graciously! They understood, and she was happy until suddenly the flowers withered and their petals fell, and at the foot of her bed appeared the cruel nun who had tortured her at the convent, the ugly, hard, withered woman with red eyes and yellow protruding teeth, and the nun gloated over her fiendishly and said:

“I knew the evil in you when you were a child. Never was there any hope of your salvation. You have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost and you are damned in eternal fire, to burn for ever and ever while the saints of God look down and see you as you are, beautiful for ever and for ever damned!”

Fiendish was the cruel gloating in the woman's eyes, most horrible as it turned to a drunken hue and she became the woman of the flat, jeering and sneering, wiping her hand across her licentious lips and crying out that she was among the saints of God, while Valerie was damned, for ever damned.

“For God's sake, ducky, tell me, tell me what it is,” said Chris Atwell, blubbering.

“A dream,” murmured Valerie. “A dream, a dream!”

## CHAPTER III

STEPHEN LAWRIE

FOR Stephen every moment spilled out its joy. The long strain of mental resistance to the slow destruction of his generation, which, for him, had begun long before the outbreak of the war, was broken. The beloved had come, and the truth that he had sought with such blind patience was his, securely apprehended in every movement of the soul that had at last established contact with his senses. Valerie to him was far more than the beloved woman she was, beauty, most terrible, and revelation more awful than the God of his childhood whom he had rejected as not containing sufficient Godhead. He knew now whither he was going, and had no longer to burrow for his thoughts or to wait upon reaction. The mode of living which he had used to make existence tolerable fell away from him. There was now no suffering that he could not bear, no agony that he could not turn to sweetness. He knew where he stood in relation to the calamity which had overtaken the world. It was the sum of all the lies of generations, and there could be no cure for it but truth, not a mere sifting of facts, but a rejection, if need be, of everything that falsified human consciousness: neither a return to any imagined primitive simplicity, but

a leap forward into a knowledge so deep and passionate that it could laugh even at reason.

He need no longer feel that he was under any debt to Mr. Perekatov. He could show him, if need be, that the Russian lie was the most blasphemous of all, since it consisted in a lazy exploitation of the group-consciousness and an idolatry of the emanation that could be got out of any meeting of human beings: a kind of intoxication with the smell of humanity.

Time enough for all that: plenty of time. First there must be the marriage flight with Valerie, and then the flame of passion burning its way through all the lumber of life until it had shaped a world out of their love whose light should be as that of a star wheeling through the night of existence.

"I feel," he wrote to her, "like Alice in Wonderland falling down the well, except that I am falling up and down at the same time."

She was like himself, he knew, in her insistence on doing what she felt to be right without reference to anything or any one else, and that she would wait indefinitely until she knew what she really felt. . . . Happy she, to have known so early in life, and how gloriously she would grow as the years went by!

He was intoxicated once again to receive from his instincts a direct assurance of the beauty of natural things: and even the handiwork of men was flooded with loveliness and power. The towns of the North seemed to him now to be units of human energy, splendid in themselves and so



mighty that they could afford to be indifferent to the devastation they wrought, since at any moment they could find just that farther expression which would redeem the evil of the past.

How foolish was it to use force to protect this England that by the impulse of her soul could repudiate all the folly of humanity and make the childish, greedy races stand ashamed! Force! All this show of guns and engines of war was weakness compared with the force that moved from the human soul! What more was it, indeed, than a confession of weakness, of sickness and distrust of the spirit?

What could the mind do in this confusion? It could only grope and try to disentangle the knotted web of prejudice and mob passion, through which the soul could pass as easily as the light of the sun through troubled water.

The silence in which he had lived for so long had become rich and fruitful. He had but to bide his time, to bide his time.

## §

At the appointed hour he returned to London. Valerie was waiting for him on the platform. The violent emotions through which he had passed had almost swept away his physical memory of her. His spirit kindled to her presence so that it was some little time before he recognised that this was, indeed, her face, her voice, her hand within his.

“You are well again?” she said.

"Never, never so well."

She hugged his arm and whispered exultantly :

"And did *I* do it for you?"

"You, only you."

"Tell me again!"

"Only, only you."

She was reassured. This time of waiting had been the most fearful of her young life : an anguish of doubt with the terror of her dream weighing on her, making her think that she was wrong, wicked, selfish in her desire to be herself in order to have the more to give. If she was not herself, true to her deepest feeling, what had she to give? Only things external to herself, only things that could be given easily and at no cost. . . . It was not true. She had been right, and that nightmare composite of the good woman, the nun, who had tormented her as a child, and the bad woman, the drunkard, who had wrought such havoc with her girlhood on her first coming to London, was wrong. What had they ever done to make life beautiful? What had they ever given? The one had cared only for her own soul, the other only for her own body. . . . Ah! It was only a dream, but, until now, with Stephen again, it had been the most appalling reality.

His words, his arm about her, the vast change in him swept it away. This was the only reality there could ever be for her.

"I loved your letters," she said. "You must write to me every day."

"Even when I am with you?"

"It gives me so much more of you. I shall keep

them all, so that people can know that in the greatest war in history there was the greatest love."

He laughed at her.

"It's true," she said.

"I believe it is. . . . Have you seen Perekatov?"

"No. I have seen no one. I just waited for you to come back."

He frowned at that. It was not healthy for her not to be moving and active.

"I heard some music. It was just like you talking."

"What music?"

"Mozart, I think. It was just like you, laughing so deep down that no one but me can hear it. Why do you always laugh?"

"Perhaps because life has hurt me so much, and because nothing is as one imagines it."

"You are exactly as I imagined you."

"You have made that up since we met."

"Did we ever meet? I can't remember a time when I didn't know you."

She laughed gaily and explained:

"I was thinking of a story my mother tells against me. I was very cold in bed one night and crying as usual, and when they brought blankets and eiderdowns I said: 'No, that isn't the kind of warmth I want. I want human warmth.'"

"Oh you adorable——"

When they reached her rooms he made her tell him more stories of herself as a child and sat entranced. As she told her tales he thought that here was the princess who proved her royalty by



showing her susceptibility to the presence of a pea under many mattresses. He told her so, and she said :

" Yes. I was always hurt until now. Are you going to hurt me ? "

" Yes. I'm afraid so. It is going to take years to get things straight. "

" I will make everything straight for you. "

" Brave ! But I ran away from life as it was for my generation. "

" So did I. "

" I ran away by sitting still until everything blew up. It nearly killed me because my friends gave me up one by one. "

" They weren't friends then. "

" Perhaps not, " he said. " I had a wife. She gave me up too. "

" She was not a wife then. "

" No. "

There was no limit to her understanding of him, or her acceptance.

" All that, " she said, " is on the other side of the war. You said once, or perhaps you only thought it : What happens in Time has no bearing on what happens in Eternity. "

" That is what I was working out. People had got muddled between the two. "

" You know, " she said, " I hear what you think even when you are not with me. "

Tears of happiness trickled down his cheeks, and he hung his head. Her love, he knew, and her capacity for love were greater than his.

## §

It is the great advantage of exile that it gives time for the consideration of the problems of existence in solitary contemplation. In ordinary life the greater part of a man or a woman's mental energy goes in removing or palliating the discomforts immediately in prospect. . . . Stephen's discomfort was so acute that he could not ignore it, but at the same time he could not think. He had trained himself to live in a passionate concentration upon intellectual conceptions only to find his carefully hoarded passion diverted from its chosen object upon a young woman, who, being also an exile, was as elusive as any mathematical symbol. The absurdity of his fate was so ludicrous that he laughed at himself until he cried.

His deep concern with abstractions had left him with hardly any sense of concrete things, and he had about as much technical equipment for life as a child of seven. He was astonished to find that people, contact with whom he had jealously shunned, were awake to the charm that he had discovered through Valerie. The little shopkeepers smiled happily when he came in to buy his bread and milk : children in the street stopped and expected him to speak to them, and when he did so grinned trustfully and ran away wild with glee. Mlle. Donnat was in and out of his room continuously, and she made him new curtains and chair-covers, which rather depressed him because he could not bring himself to tell her that he would

not be there much longer. She, too, was light-hearted and sang up and down the stairs and in her room, and the other inmates of the house began to visit Stephen to tell him their troubles.

"Perhaps my mother was right," thought Stephen. "Perhaps I ought to have been a parson."

He had not the faintest idea of what he was, and, indeed, took no interest in the subject.

Mlle. Donnat chatted at great length about her youth in Paris, and Stephen began to think that might be the place for himself and Valerie, except that while the war continued there was no getting there. This was what made the situation so extraordinary. There was no possibility of movement. A very great thing had happened, a great love had come into being, but there was apparently no room for it in a world devoted to self-destruction. Here were two people miraculously given the power to live naturally and in accordance with their own deepest truth which, to the world caught up in uncontrolled machinery, seemed entirely irrelevant, even impertinent. Yet, for having come to light in exile it was all the more defiantly beautiful. . . . The war had become a matter of orthodoxies, for or against, and heresy of any kind was taboo. Robust humanity was a heresy, whose vileness could only be exceeded by love.

Stephen was astonished to find that he was, after all, robust. He had been accustomed to regard himself as rather delicate and over-sensitive, but now he discovered that his sensibility was backed by an extraordinary toughness which made



the crisis through which he was passing an entertainment rather than an experience. That superb week with Valerie had been experience enough for a lifetime and it made everything else, even Mr. Perekatov, rather trivial.

## §

MR. PEREKATOV, meanwhile, was deeply concerned, the more deeply as he had begun to regard Stephen Lawrie as a joke, the kind of joke that can only happen in England, before which the amazed foreigner can only remove his hat, humbly submitting that he is unable to see the point of it, while at the same time it has a beauty all the more confounding because it need not be taken tragically. Mr. Perekatov knew perfectly well with his massive intellect that here was the key to the secret of England, but he could make no use of it because his intellect could not tell him what to do.

He was easier in his mind when he thought of Valerie du Toit. She was a character and he liked her bubbling sense of fun. He told himself that she was one of the people who would begin to be produced after the war, people who were above race. She was a child of war, born in the thick of it in South Africa and therefore accustomed to it, and not made half-hysterical by it as the English women were. So far Stephen Lawrie was in luck, but Mr. Perekatov was sure in his own mind that she would make Stephen unhappy because she was too young for exile, and everything that happened

in it must seem absolutely unreal to her, and immaterial. He had been through that himself when he first came to London. Nothing was or could be concrete because he was always living with reference to the people at home in the Ukraine and not to the people with whom he was actually in contact.

Mr. Perekatov knew, too, that, as the oldest hand at exile, he stood between these young people and the world, that if it could get at them would make them pay dearly for their effrontery. He determined that, if he could procure it, the world should find no loophole. An intellectual *malgré lui*, impressions, thoughts, premonitions, intuitions all became definite ideas with him, and now a stream of ideas flowed in his mind between three places: Stephen Lawrie's rooms, Valerie du Toit's flat, and the studio where he, Mr. Perekatov, had broken his glasses. Round and round went the stream and there seemed to be nothing that could stop it. Valerie du Toit, Stephen, himself were all cut off both by their circumstances and by the passion that had sprung to life from the rest of humanity, who were all, apparently, sucked into the war with the exception of the Russians, who were talking, and the derelicts round Freda Carruthers, who were visibly rotting away. From no direction could relief come. Mr. Perekatov knew perfectly well that the stream of ideas in his head was only his own particular substitute for the passion to which bitter experience had taught him not to surrender. He knew, too, that Stephen and Valerie had surrendered. They were incan-

descent with it, and sooner or later there must come an explosion. He tried to tell himself that nothing could be better, and that it was precisely what was needed to turn Stephen Lawrie from a joke into a man, but then it was as a good English joke that Mr. Perekatov loved Stephen, and he was not at all sure that, turned into a man, he might not prove to be essentially commonplace, because that, again, was adorably English. Scratch a poet and you find a Tory.

Mr. Perekatov ran his tongue over his lower lip thousands of times as he turned the situation over and over in his mind. It was a relief to escape from it into thinking of Stephen as to whom he felt uneasily that he was on the wrong tack. Mr. Perekatov was beginning to discover that his friend was neither as soft nor as easy nor as innocent as he had thought him. Like Stephen himself he was beginning to be aware of a toughness. That relieved Mr. Perekatov, for he thought that the stream of passion might break on that.

The danger as he saw it, was so great, and it fascinated him so much that he could not avoid attempting to establish with Stephen a real intimacy, a contact, if possible, closer than that with Valerie. As Mr. Perekatov judged her he could not see how she could give Stephen the intellectual support that in his state of eruption he needed. He called on Stephen many times during the day, and not finding him visited him at last in the middle of the night.



## §

THE room was lit up. Mlle. Donnat's striped curtains made a gay patch of colour in the dark street. Her window was lit, too, for she was sitting up listening to Stephen pacing up and down, up and down, longing for the moment of exhaustion to come when she could step in and finally install herself and fulfil the needs roused in her by the *poète* of her youth. Mr. Perekatov saw that and understood that Stephen needed his protection.

He knocked and was admitted. Mlle. Donnat looked out of the window just in time to see him go in.

Stephen's hair was standing on end. His room—table, bed, floor—was littered with papers.

"You are having a fine tussle. But what are the books for? They can tell you nothing about love."

"To hell with books!" shouted Stephen. "I'm glad you've come. I've been wanting some one to talk at."

"At?"

"Yes. A solid mountain of a man like you is just the thing. I want to tell you what I am."

"That's good," said Mr. Perekatov, sitting heavily on the bed and producing his cigarette case.

"I'm as Scotch as a haggis," said Stephen. "A Scotsman can be English as he puts on an overcoat, and I've done that. I've done it thoroughly; I've been to their public school, to their 'Varsity, to their Bar, all their flummery of a career, but I

couldn't make a career because I don't believe in it. I don't care a hoot for them and all their monuments. Bourgeois? I'm a man of the mountains and the mists, and the sweetest hours that e'er I spent were spent among the lasses O! That's wha' I am. Englished? I can no more be Englished than Valerie can, or—or you, who are a Jew and a prophet."

"Scotch!" said Mr. Perekatov, his formula for Stephen Lawrie crumbling away ridiculously.

"Yes," said Stephen, "Scots. I've been reading Burns as my grandfather used to read him to me when I was a child, laughing with him one moment and crying with him the next, and to hell with your literature, I say! To hell with it! This is flesh and blood written down by a man strong enough to lose no grip on himself and to think with every nerve in his body so that the whole force of him runs down into the point of his pen. And that devil, that swindler, that theatrical scene-painter, that snivelling attorney, Walter Scott, dished him. Can't you see it? Honest Burns thinking the great and mighty Scott would help him to the public ear, and Scott patronising him, patting him on the head, the ploughboy! Patronising! . . . I tell you that calamity produced the nineteenth century and the mess we are all in, every one of us. Burns told us how to live, but we put up a monument to Scott instead, and then one to Prince Albert, and one to Queen Victoria, and thousands to the people who died in South Africa and we'll want to put up thousands more to the people who are dying now, who ought never to have died, never, never, and

never would have done if Scott had not seen that one line of Burns had more magic and charm and sweetness and life in it than the whole mausoleum of his Waverley Novels. Byron and Shelley did what they could to put it straight, but the mischief was done."

"Well, well," said Mr. Perekatov.

"It is true. The whole silly, romantic, school-girlish, hysterical, namby-pamby, mawkish, gawky, puling stunt of the nineteenth century is Scott, and no one else. In my view there have been only two men of supreme genius, two men who have really understood humanity. . . ."

"Shakespeare and Dostoievsky," said Mr. Perekatov.

"Wrong again, my patriarch. Aristophanes and Robert Burns."

With that Stephen ended his astonishing tirade by reading in a loud voice the first glorious Chorus from the Birds. When he had finished, he said:

"Yes. It has only been done twice. The third time should make a difference."

"Nothing will ever make any difference," said Mr. Perekatov. "Nothing. When one swindler has finished there will be a new one. I hope you feel better."

"I do," said Stephen. "I need not pretend to be English any more."

Mr. Perekatov took his glasses from his nose and wiped them, saying:

"I have been trying to persuade myself that you were a man. You are only a joke."

"That," replied Stephen, "is precisely what I



have been trying to tell you. Walter Scott was a monument. There are a few good jokes in the world, many monuments, and in between the two are Mr. Perekatov and the rest of humanity."

"I am pleased with the compliment," returned Mr. Perekatov, flushed with pleasure at the affection with which Stephen spoke.

## §

THAT was a terrible winter. It had become clear that the war was to be fought through to some sort of end, though no one knew how or why or when, and both cause and objects had been forgotten. Disaster and calamity had become so much a part of the day's doings that a lull was almost disquietingly tedious. So tight was the pressure that nerves had to remain at stretch, and could not break nor even relax. There could be no change, no relief, no collapse, either psychological or financial until the machine stopped. Therefore no one wanted the machine to stop, for if it did the consequences would have to be faced. Thought and feeling everywhere were lost in hysteria, and relief was found in joyless debauchery, physical, mental, emotional, religious, literary, journalistic, theatrical, charitable: the very virtues in the vacuum became vices, the more virulent for the perversion. In a sense Valerie du Toit was lucky in that of all these forms of debauchery she only came in contact with the physical, except through Ducie whose orgies of self-torment terrified her. She began to understand the strength that made it

possible for Stephen to preserve the sweetness of laughter, although, being so strange to her, she could not altogether trust it. She had just the shade of greater strength than he to make her position perilous, for it was the one thing that her will could not alter. Where she suffered, he laughed, and she could not yet grasp that his passage through suffering was so incredibly swift as to leave him unscathed. She could not away with the feeling that it was unfair to Ducie, who laboured so ferociously for everything that came to Stephen easily, that he should be taken and the other left. She saw perfectly clearly that a man who signed an oath of allegiance to this appalling thing that had seized the world wrote his own doom and that of all his hopes. How, then, having, in all innocence, raised her soldier's hopes so high could she avoid giving him such comfort as lay within her reach?

He told her both in letters and whenever he saw her that without her he could not, could not face the thing he had sworn to do, and that if he were a coward he could not live. It was impossible to reason with him. He could only feel with the passion that moved so gustily in him and whipped his blood to fever-pitch.

During his punishment for breaking camp he was cramped almost every minute of the day with pencil in hand writing to her, groans of despair, threats, promises, entreaties, supplication. She was his Heaven, his light, his joy, his religion. Through her shone art, beauty, truth, joy, love—ethereal, delirious, laughter-lilting love such as never before had stirred the heart of man. Away

from her were bestiality, avarice, greed, sloth, horrors indescribable of the soul. He had a power of writing that gripped Valerie when she read his letters, a rude force that she felt would be wasted, if, as he said she could, she destroyed him, by thrusting him down into the black slime of life which he loathed.

In one letter he told her with a vivid hard clarity how bitterly he had climbed up out of it: his childhood in an Eastbourne lodging-house before his father opened a shop and made money: the dreadful solitude of an English child: the smuttiness and tortured longings of his schooldays finding vent at last in religious hysteria and the revolting semi-Popery of the High Church: training for orders, religion spilling over into the hell-fire of perverted instincts: an æsthetic friendship to escape from which he had plunged into the *niaiserie* of the Café Royal, and from that into Socialism and Politics, which he had found to be merely a system by which slothful men levered themselves into a position from which they could filch money from the simple and energy from the eager: and then women, always and everywhere women, daughters of the horseleech. . . . And then, at last, you, you, you, my daughter of the dawn, my firstborn of the light, you who are light itself, golden with the gold of kingcups by the river, golden with the gold of the lion's mane, most golden with the gold of the Holy Grail that never was on earth, nor drowned in any sea or holy river, nor hovered in the sky, but from the earth and from the sea and from the sky gathered



all the glory they contain into itself to shine for ever and for ever and for ever, Amen. O Valerie, I will say Amen to whatever happens if only, while I live, I may never take my eyes from the image of you.

So, blinded with the gold that he saw in her, he would stumble into the mud of Flanders.

"It is impossible, impossible, impossible," he wrote, "that you should ever love any one else. My love surrounds you so completely that no one could ever approach you. Do you hear? Do you hear? My love would never allow that. My love would strike any one dead who dared such profanation."

Valerie's instinct took that for what it was, a confession that he knew, yet would not admit his knowledge to himself. She was alarmed for Stephen. How could Ducie do anything but hate him, who was free when he was enslaved, clear-sighted when he was blind? . . . So Valerie, too, became aware of the completeness of their isolation through the passion that was moving, and of all concerned only she saw clearly how the four of them, herself, Stephen, Mr. Perekatov and Ducie were knit together by it; three exiles and one who shared the doom that was working in society.

She wrote to him, and, attempting to be frank, told him of the new friends she had made—Stephen Lawrie and Mr. Perekatov, two men who were different from any she had ever known, men who, she thought, would make the world change for a good many people. It was all so new to her that she could find no word for it, and could only say

that for the first time since her coming to England she had begun to be happy. But that was not quite true, because she knew perfectly well that she could never be really happy until her exile ceased and she could link, if that were possible, what she had found in London with her own people. To reassure Ducie, and to amuse him, she described Miss Atwell's Electric Act, in which that good lady held an electric bulb between her teeth and pretended to receive the discharge of a current that would kill an elephant. "A trick for Kaffirs," she called it. She also said that there was great hope of Miss Atwell's marrying her employer. . . . She did not tell Ducie, or any one, of the activities of Björnson, Charles, Freda Carruthers, and the rest.

## §

VALERIE had heard of a pawnshop, but she had never imagined its importance in English society. She had often enough at home seen people lose their heads and become intoxicated with the presence of a millionaire, but she hardly realised that she herself was having precisely the same effect on the penniless and idle persons whom Freda Carruthers, in her search for the free life of the modern woman, had gathered round her. They crowded round the studio like vagabonds round a soup-kitchen. There were always food and drink to be had, and Valerie's generosity was pleased by the spectacle. She had been chilled by the lack of hospitality in England, and

it warmed her to run over to the studio and to see the gas-stove full of chickens roasting, of puddings and soups boiling, toast and kidneys or soles grilling: cakes, jellies, tarts, cold viands spread out on a long table in the studio, with a dresser full of bottles, cheese, and biscuits, which Charles called Freda's Bar. All sorts and kinds of people came. The Russians who had been with Mr. Perekatov got wind of it and used to arrive all together, though never mingling with the rest. Their form of debauchery was talk and drink, and gambling had no attraction for them. They ate voraciously, and Valerie, watching them from her corner in the fireplace, was astonished. She had never dreamed that people could be so hungry.

It was not often that Valerie went over: only to please Freda Carruthers, who insisted that she must see life, and that it was bad for her to be cooped up alone.

Freda also was alarmed by Valerie's increasing intimacy with Stephen Lawrie. She saw her chances of returning with her to South Africa to find a rich husband receding. She insisted, therefore, that if Valerie was her friend, she would help her through with the "crowd," as she called them. To Valerie they were only a crowd for whom she was intensely sorry because they were so hungry and so poor. They borrowed money from her, but she did not suspect that she was paying for their entertainment, or that her jewels, her trunks, her dresses, her very shoes were being pawned day by day to raise the wind. She imagined, when she thought about it at all, that the bills were met



by Freda's one rich friend, Robert Rolls, a heavy middle-aged man who had a number of big shops in the suburbs. He was fond of Freda, and Freda said she loved him, and Valerie hoped that her friend might be as fortunate as herself to have surrendered irrevocably to love.

Stephen never came, and Valerie was glad. He was as alien to all this as herself. She was more than content that for the present he and she should be isolated by their love, with no other contact with the world than through Mr. Perekatov. When Stephen did not come to see her she was content, knowing that he must be sifting the shattered fragments of his previous existence with his friend's help. She knew her power, how she could touch a man's soul to make it leap into fiery activity, and never had she used it so thoroughly as with this man whom she loved at once. And she felt that she owed it to him to release Ducie from his dilemma. If she failed Ducie, she would be failing Stephen.

When she told Stephen about it he agreed with her. To dismiss the wretched man would be to drive him to make an end of himself. To help him might be to save him if he came through the ordeal of the war, and he might even become as true a friend as Mr. Perekatov.

Never for a moment were her thoughts away from the tangle, and it eased her to go over to the studio and to be among these people whose existence was purely physical.

## §

BJÖRNSON arrived one night with his patron, a huge bearded painter, who at once reserved four bottles of wine for his own consumption, and, to the horror and sickening pleasure of everybody present, kicked Björnson against the wall and proceeded to pelt him with bottles, bread, cheese, salad, bones. The horror of it gripped Valerie and shook her into realisation of the meaning of it all. That, she understood, was how Björnson earned his living. These people were all parasites and were gathered like flies round money—her money. . . . She saw at once that Freda had used her to mark down her rich draper, to whom she would be what Björnson was to the painter, a creature on whom to vent his own self-contempt. . . . And this was life, this the life in which she had dared to believe in love. In essence it was no different from the life at home in South Africa, a cloud of parasites gathered about money. They were no longer poor hungry people, but men and women expertly living as they wished to live, exercising skilfully their profession. . . . The frenzy they had been in had somehow broken with the arrival of the drunken painter. The Russians watched it all with savage glee, and the Jewess began to explain it psychologically.

Chris Atwell came in looking for Valerie.

“Good God, child!” she cried. “This is no place for you. Ducie’s come. He’s looking bad. He says he must see you.”

"Tell him to come over here," said Valerie. "I want him to see this. It will do him good."

"He'll kill them all."

"Tell him to come here," Valerie insisted.

Scared and white with fright, Chris Atwell went away, and in a few minutes Ducie appeared. The light dazzled him, and what he saw stunned him so that he put his hand up to his eyes. Valerie's eyes had a cruel light in them as she looked across at him. With his hand in front of his eyes, he stumbled over to her; and, when she told him to sit down, sat by her side and tried to take her hand.

"How cold your hand is!" he said.

He was appalled by what he saw. He had grown hardened to the nightmare of living with men who every day grew more animal, coarsened with the coarse food they were given and by the foolish jests that filled the gaps in the nothing they had to say to each other. But this was worse. It was as though the nightmare had broken into an unfathomable horror. The war was bad, but the world outside the war was worse, infinitely worse. He was especially disgusted by the swarthy faces of the Russians floating over the scene and by the fat-faced shopkeeper leering at Freda Carruthers and whispering to her. The painter pelting Björnson was a relief if anything: rather funny. . . . The Jewess had begun to talk at the top of her voice. The painter started singing to Björnson:

"Come hither, little Björnson,  
Come hither, little star;  
You dirty little neutral,  
How I wonder what you are!"



The egregious Charles, jealous of Björnson, because the painter was very rich, began trying to attract attention to himself, and, with his eye on the shopkeeper, he called out :

“ I’m going to marry Freda. Freda’s going to get me a job—a job in a shop.”

Freda hurried her shopkeeper out of hearing, and, baulked of the effect he hoped to produce, Charles came lurching over to where Valerie and Ducie sat. He stood swaying and propped himself up, and, holding out his hand like a waiter for a tip, he said :

“ So you’re the lucky man. We all bet it was Stephen Lawrie. But I say : to hell with all soldiers.”

Ducie leaped at him, seized him by the neck, and threw him a dozen yards into the astonished painter’s lap. Valerie did not see what happened. The violence was at length too much for her. For a second or two she stood imagining that Stephen was by her side, making her safe, while Mr. Perekatov was on the floor, saying continually :

“ Lawrie ! The glasses are broke, heh ? ”

She could not bear it, and ran out into the night. Ducie had not finished. He half hoped that Stephen Lawrie might be in the room. He would get to the bottom of this business. He had gleaned much from Chris Atwell, and his first desire was to have it out with Freda Carruthers. He hunted her out from the dining-room, where she was in hiding.

“ Come out, you liar ! ” he roared. “ Come out, you trull, you scraping of the grease-pan—come

out and tell me what you have done. Where are Valerie's things, her jewels, her trunks, her clothes—hundreds and hundreds of pounds, all spent to keep this going—this—this—this, and to drag her down, to pass her round, for you to feed on in turn. Get out! Get out! Get out! Every rogue and every trull of you. Go back to your kennels! Get out I say. . . .”

He was enormously strong. He picked up men and women three at a time and threw them towards the door, and they went laughing and giggling: some of the women screaming as a body went flying over them or landed on top of them.

Before very long no one was left but the drunken painter, who had slipped down on the floor and was asleep, with a Stilton cheese for a pillow, while Björnson, hysterically weeping, ran through his pockets. Björnson looked up at Ducie cunningly, and said:

“I can tell you about Stephen Lawrie. Damn scoundrel.”

“Shut up!” said Ducie, panting, the veins on his temples throbbing, his eyes hot and so painful that it seemed their sockets would no longer hold them. He thought:

“I've got to go out there and fight and kill for this, while this is going on. It is always going on—on and on and on. It never stops. It always will be. . . . And Valerie, oh my God, Valerie!”

He was suddenly calm.

“Be quiet,” he said to Björnson. “And put back what you have stolen from your master.”

In terror Björnson obeyed him.

"Take him out," said Ducie.

Björnson dragged his master out, propped him up and staggered away into the darkness under his burden.

Ducie followed him and found Valerie shivering with disgust at the corner of the street.

"I think I hate you," he said, "or I wish I could. Dear God, I wish I could."

"You should have left them alone. They can't help being what they are."

"They could help being near you. That was the intolerable thing. That was what hurt me."

"Why shouldn't you be hurt?"

"Don't. I want to know. How long has it been going on?"

"About a month I think. I don't know. I never thought about it."

"Chris Atwell told me. They have stripped you."

"I daresay."

"Don't you care?"

"No," she said. "Why should I? There are things that no one can take from you. All this is only happening in Time."

"Where did you get that from? Who is behind you? Who has taken possession of you? Don't stand there. You must be cold."

"Have they all gone?" she asked after a pause.

"Yes."

"Let us go back to the studio. I shall live there."

"Impossible."

"I want to live there. I can't go on living with



Chris. She wakes up in the morning and calls me 'Ducky.' I can't stand it. She can have my flat. I shall have the studio."

"But that devil will come back."

"No, she won't. You have cleared them all out. She will have to find some one else as foolish or as indifferent as I have been."

They started to walk back to the studio. His fury had gone, and he had almost forgotten his jealousy.

"Why did you let her?" he asked.

"Nothing mattered. Simply that. Nothing mattered."

"Oh, they have hurt you!"

"Not at all," she said scornfully. "How could they? You haven't even begun to understand me. I didn't fight my way out for nothing."

They had reached the studio again, a dismal, dim-lit spectacle. The painter's Stilton cheese was still in the middle of the floor, and all around was a dreadful litter of bottles, glasses, cake, bread, bones, accumulated in a hideous pile against the wall where Björnson had stood as a target.

"I'm glad," he said—"I'm glad I cleared that out for you. Don't you see that you can't fight on alone?"

"I can. I shall stay here now. You must help me to clear it up."

"You! Alone in this great barrack of a place! Oh, come!"

"You can take it or leave it."

He gave in. He had no will to set against hers, and together for some hours they worked almost

in silence. She wanted to make the place beautiful, because it was there that she and Stephen had saluted each other. As she worked she planned that Stephen should leave his rooms and join her there. The studio was hers: she had paid for it; and it had been desecrated. It had become her duty to Stephen to make it sweet again.

No crisis could make her other than practical, and she designed to make a room for him with screens, and to put in a bath and an electric cooker. And then when they were installed Mr. Perekatov should come and see them, and they would all sit in the big fireplace and laugh over the evening when he broke his glasses, and when the war was over Ducie would join them. He would love Stephen, and together they would go to her country, where there were sun and air and the warm keen-smelling earth, and war was only a memory. . . .

"We're under orders for next week," said Ducie.

"Next week?"

It had been on the tip of her tongue to tell him of the dream that warmed and soothed her troubled mind. Next week? She had to stand by this man until he was gone. Given time he might have understood, he might have wrestled it out, but now there was no time. A week was too short. The lust roused in him by this night's violence would be too strong for him. No; she could tell him nothing.

He felt her abstraction from him, and said:

"It brings it nearer: the time when I shall

claim you. Living or dead I shall do that. There's no room for love in the world as it is now and with men as they are now."

She laughed. He turned on her :

"All right. Pretend you don't care. I care. I have cared for you, and watched over you most jealously. You're young enough to think that everything in life can be accepted."

"Everything," she said.

"Some things you've got to smash or they'll smash you!" he cried excitedly.

"Am I one of them?"

"You may be," he said, almost unaware that he had spoken, and immediately staggered by the violence of the feeling that was released in him.

"I'm glad to know it," she replied.

"You know what you are to me," he went on. "Something that I have been through hell for, and I am going through worse."

"You must go away now. I'm tired."

"You are not going to sleep here?"

"Yes, I am. I am going to stay here now while I am in England."

"I shall walk up and down all night—on guard."

"There are policemen."

"Oh, for God's sake don't mock me!"

"Then don't worry me, Howard. To-night has been too much for me."

"Very well. One expects you somehow to be as inexhaustible as the wind."

"You do say nice things, sometimes."

She came to him like a child to a fond uncle and put up her face to be kissed. He took her



in his arms and held her until he almost swooned, murmuring to keep the sobs in his breast from breaking into a storm of words and tears :

“ I wish to God I could laugh, Valerie.”

“ I wish you could, Howard.”

With that she danced away from him, turned and kissed her hand to him and raced with her hair wildly flying into the bedroom, the outer handle of which had been removed from the door.

Ducie carefully locked the outer door, and, with the key in his pocket, walked up and down all night until she awoke to give him breakfast. He had to return early to camp, but promised to spend his embarkation leave with her.

“ I feel a thousand times better for last night,” he said : “ a thousand times. I was even happy to have you in the studio. When I turned the key in the lock I felt that I had you for ever and ever.”

## §

VALERIE laughed aloud with glee when she surveyed the wreckage. It was so wonderfully complete. Her wardrobe had been rifled and she had hardly a rag to wear. Her hats were gone, her shoes, her dressing-case, and its silver contents. Even furniture that she had bought for her flat had been removed. Of the Valerie du Toit who had come to London a few months before nothing was left. London had removed every vestige of her property, and she was left, just herself, Valerie du Toit, to face the world and untrammelled to make of it what she wished. As London had

given her Stephen Lawrie—through his inability to come to terms with it—she did not complain. . . . And the studio was wonderful. The rent was paid: her diamond and platinum pendant had gone for that, and it was hers to live in as she chose and to make delightful for Stephen.

So intent was she on this project that she forbade him to come to see her until she had her wonderful surprise, but, needing help, she admitted Mr. Perekatov to her secret.

"That's good," he said. "You'll make a man of him."

"A great man?"

Mr. Perekatov nodded, and so helpful and sympathetic was he that her tongue was loosed, and she talked to him, all of Stephen and herself.

"Why do you hide from yourself?" said Mr. Perekatov.

"I don't."

"You do. No one more. Many have cause to do so, but what have you?"

She told him about Ducie. He shook his head.

"That is not it."

"It is."

"No. I understand. Some one you have run away from. I ran away too. Some one I had to kill, or run away."

"You see, I don't know. It was something that happened before I was born. In the war I think. It has always made terrible unhappiness and jealousy, and the weight of it was always on me."

"I think," said Mr. Perekatov slowly, "there

are some people who suffer all they can early, and it is finished. They have just to watch life going by. They must be alone, always alone."

"You think that I——"

"I don't say. Lawrie is different. He is one who must live. I never met before a man I could not understand. I can only say, as I heard a woman say: There is something attractive."

"But you love him?"

"Yes."

"You will always be his friend?"

"Always."

"I want him to live here."

"You talk as if you were going away."

"Perhaps I am. I always know what is going to happen before it happens."

"I do not understand you either," said Mr. Perekatov.

"But you like?"

"Yes," he said, smiling at her childishness. "I like. . . . But you are not going away, just when everything is beginning?"

"I have never stayed long anywhere. Already I have been all over Africa, and to India and Ceylon and Egypt and Madeira and England and Birmingham."

"Oh, a travelled lady!"

"Where have you been?"

"Only in Russia and England. It is enough."

"And why are you so nice, being a Jew?"

"There *are* good Jews, some of them full of an aspiration. It is all aspiration for something better, even that which makes your millionaires



or your little Jew in Whitechapel who moves to Hackney."

"What should Stephen do?"

"Give people back their souls."

"Can he?"

"He can. There is more than himself alive in him."

"It depends on me then?"

Mr. Perekatov nodded, ran his tongue over his lower lip, and said:

"You must make him understand that life is not a joke to the rest of us. We want to laugh and we cannot; to sing and we cannot, to live and we cannot. Look at me! Am I made for dancing?"

"No. But I am," cried Valerie, rising on the points of her toes and gliding to and fro on them.

"Oh, you!" said Mr. Perekatov, shrugging. "You are as bad as he." And he shook the back of his hand at her. "But you are only a child and I am an old man and can talk to you. Don't marry. Marriage is antiquated and not for people who have anything to do, for people who are conscious. It is well enough for a navvy, who must know that his woman is there in the kitchen to cook his food and to give him children and to be flogged on Saturday. But how could you be pinned down, or Lawrie? You have to make life for others, not children for yourselves. . . . It is strange, but I am always thinking of this studio—ceaselessly—and all the more because I am here. . . . Are you expecting something or some one?"

"No," said Valerie. "No one. I want no one."

"That's good. I was afraid."

"How can you be afraid?"

"I don't think I ever was before."

## §

STEPHEN was like an obedient child closing his eyes to see what God will send him. On a hint from Mr. Perekatov he knew that preparations were being made for him, and he arranged to rid himself of his possessions as thoroughly as Valerie had been stripped of hers. He presented his furniture to Mlle. Donnat, who accepted the gift morosely, understanding that her dream was ended. What were his goods to her if she was to be deprived of his living presence?

He kept only a few of his books and sold the rest, all that was left of his English education. For him now the mountains of his deepest memory and the summit of his soul. He was intoxicated with eagerness for the new life that was opening up before him. Mr. Perekatov was very sly and mysterious, and would only give him winks and nods and mumbled words. Every now and then he would say:

"The glasses are broke, Lawrie: heh? Yours, not mine."

And they would roar with laughter.

"Glasses!" Stephen would cry. "A microscope! I leave that to the Huns. It is an end of exile for all of us. Valerie dancing is to me

just like Burns singing. Even more, because what he gives me is only a fruition in time, while she goes dancing through eternity."

"There is certainly no one like her," said Mr. Perekatov. "She tames even me into a dancing bear."

He had caught Stephen's excitement, and, grunting a comic little Russian tune, he gave a very good imitation of a performing bear, heaving from side to side, then rolling head over heels and sitting up and looking round for a bun.

Then, rising, he shook his head :

"No. It is no good. I can no longer be young. You see, she is not in love with me."

"What is this surprise that you and she are so mysterious about?" asked Stephen.

"Wait and see," replied Mr. Perekatov heavily. "Only a day or two more now. You will begin a new life when you leave this place."

"I have loathed it so much," said Stephen, "that I could not leave it."

Mr. Perekatov made an extraordinary noise in his throat.

"The little nations will have things all their own way : the Scotch, the Irish, the Dutch. They will laugh at my poor big country."

"They will laugh politics out of existence," cried Stephen. "Valerie and I will lead the dance and every happy soul will follow."

"You are children," growled Mr. Perekatov.

"There was never any one older than Valerie," protested Stephen, "nor any one younger."



## §

VALERIE herself was feeling extremely old. She was deeply sensible of the greatness of her responsibilities, and continually irritated by the energy she had to waste in resisting the poisoned atmosphere of the England to which she had come to find people like the characters in Shakespeare and Fielding. Her childish imagination had led her to believe that the war had brought them to life again, and that a time of heroes had arrived. She had found only people like the rich folk at home, who spent money on food and clothes in a feverish competition to impress each other, and, escaping from them, she had found Björnson, Charles, Freda, Chris Atwell. She had hoped that Ducie would be heroic, but he had spoiled everything by falling in love with her, like any Tom, Dick, or Harry with any Harriet, and he was indeed just the ordinary man desperately convinced by the upheaval of the war that he was extraordinary, sickened of the ordinary life and obstinately insisting that she should make more possible for him. She realised that it had amounted to mania, under the irritation of camp life, and she was afraid for him; angry, too, that England should take the strong men of her own country and treat them as of no more account than the frozen carcasses with which they were fed. She had found the real England in Stephen Lawrie, and it was cramped and stifled in a little room, unheeded, forgotten, ignored, tended lovingly by

a Frenchwoman and a Russian, who, being in exile, could understand it and love it and commiserate its isolation. . . . How could she make Ducie understand that? He had discarded all the lies that had swept him into the service of the fictitious England, the voracious monster that had begun its war in South Africa, and now he saw truth only in her. All his pain, all his disappointment had gone into his passion for her, which in its jealousy would not allow him to think, or feel, or imagine anything outside her. His passion would not allow him, any more than would the army system, to surmount his physical existence. To control it he had nothing but the idea of marriage, and on that his whole force was centred. He would marry her if he came through, for, without marriage, he thought and felt that his passion must destroy her and himself.

He had the disadvantage as compared with Stephen that he had known Valerie in her home, where she was a person of consequence, an aristocrat among plebeians, the finest flower of an old civilisation untouched by industrialism or democracy. In her house, that reminded him of what he had read of the Southern Americans, he had been made to feel that he was somehow not quite good enough in manners or in delicacy of spirit, and for that all the more he had worshipped her. As a child he had adored her, never dreaming that he would be able to approach her, and when they had met on the ship it had seemed to him like a thunderstroke of Fate. And when in London the woman who had the care of her—most precious

trust—had turned into a very dragon of evil, he had become her knight to save her, to serve her. She had come through that unscathed; she would come through anything and everything, and he wanted to be like her. He could conceive no other way of succeeding in that ambition than by possessing her.

Incensed by the discipline that was brought to bear on him after his escapade in breaking camp to go and see her, he began to preach crude sedition, the pathetic sentimentalism of the English revolutionaries, and floundered deeper and deeper into hot water. Every day he wrote to Valerie, and every day his letters became more agonised. He knew perfectly well that she was lost to him, but would not believe it. Had he not saved her? Had he not driven the riff-raff from her presence almost like Christ driving the money-changers out of the Temple? . . . All the religious hysteria of his youth began to well up in him again and centred round Valerie. And then he was tortured by the memory of the filthy Charles, with the name of Stephen Lawrie on his lips, and he thought of Stephen Lawrie as a being like Charles, crawling through life, fouling everything sweet and true and beautiful, running like a dog from smell to smell. Only his hope of Valerie kept his passion from surging up in an implacable, obsessive hatred of Stephen.

He had two days' embarkation leave, and rushed up to London. He was amazed at the difference in the studio and in Valerie. The whole place had been whitewashed and was gay



with bright hangings and cushions. There was an immense divan; a space curtained off in which there was a little white bed, and all was cool and sweet and reminded him of a South African room. He could even smell the veldt in it, the veldt after the rains when the brown earth is suddenly jewelled with grasses and flowers and orchids.

"How have you done it?" he said. "It is like your house."

"It is my house," said Valerie.

"Mine too?"

She wavered for a moment, but, thinking of Mr. Perekatov, she said:

"Mine, Howard. I am Valerie du Toit. I shall never marry anybody. I don't believe in it. Marriage is as medieval as the war."

"Who told you that?" he asked jealously.

"I don't need to be told things. I am happy. If you love me you ought to be happy too."

"You look to me like a bride," he said, and then could have bitten his tongue out for saying it. He knew that she had passed beyond his understanding, but he knew also that he could only endure his fate in her presence. Directly he left her the old torment would begin, the writhing of old, unhappy, disgusting memories that only she could destroy. He could not leave her.

"Valerie," he said, "I ask you humbly as a favour to marry me. It will make me happy. I don't want anything. I will see that I don't come back. I promise you that."

She understood him. Just a ceremony that meant nothing to her could appease him, and for

a moment or two she longed to help him, but that very ceremony for which he asked was a most holy sacrament to her people. They might understand her ignoring it; they could never understand, never forgive, her playing fast and loose with it, and they were more to her than Ducie. No; the only hope was that he would go out and learn something of what she had learned and come back able and ready to appreciate her and her friends. Now with the pressure of the war-machine full on him that was impossible.

She had arranged that Ducie should sleep over at her flat; but he spent the night as before, pacing up and down—on guard—boiling up every now and then into a frenzy of jealousy which broke into the crazy fancy that he was guarding her for Christ and Heaven.

## §

STEPHEN and Mr. Perekatov talked themselves into such exuberance that they forgot Valerie's instructions that they were to stay away until she sent for them, and on the night before Ducie had to return they called after a long walk over Hampstead Heath, designing to take Valerie out to look at the stars and the silly little moon that insisted on coming up, though men and women were in such a state that they could not see her.

Valerie had gone to bed when the bell rang loudly. Thinking it might be Ducie with some new knot for her to untie, she slipped on her dressing-gown and came to the door.

"I told you not to come," she said. "I'm not ready for you."

"It is such a glorious night," said Stephen, "and the full glory of it can't awake without you. We don't want to surprise your secret. I wanted you. I wanted to tell you about Burns and my grandfather so much that it wouldn't wait."

"Won't it keep till to-morrow?"

"No."

"Very well, then. I'll come out."

In Stephen's presence she felt sure that she could make Ducie happy before he went, and help him to understand that she could give him far more if he claimed nothing than if he claimed all. The night under the stars would give just the breadth she needed, just the vividness that was needed to her African memories in which so suddenly she had realised herself and grown out of childhood, out of girlhood, out of womanhood into real being. It was these two men who had done that for her, and if they wanted her now to raise their happiness into ecstasy she could not deny them.

"I won't be a minute," she said, and she ran back into the studio, leaving Stephen and Mr. Pererkatov standing by the gate of the little courtyard that separated the studio from the street.

Ducie, who had seen the visitors from the flat opposite, came down and walked quickly past them, nearly choking with his jealous rage. He felt baulked and baffled, for to him all his mighty effort in clearing the studio had been in vain. The impression left on his mind had been of dirty



Russians and crapulous Englishmen, and as he saw these two he saw Mr. Perekatov as a filthy Jew and Stephen as one of the creepy, clever intellectuals who had been brought out of their holes by the war, and his nausea was almost too much for him. Such people to have got hold of his Valerie! He knew them and their type, people who, gathered into a sect, would never be content until they had smudged the purity of all with whom they came in contact and had made them as sterile as themselves. His fingers twitched to seize Stephen's frail body and to break it in half and to grip the Jew by his thick neck and squeeze it until his eyes were forced out of his face. So it was from them that Valerie had learned the nonsense about love and her airy repudiation of marriage!

He swung round the corner to keep away from them, but could not help returning to watch. He loathed himself for it, but could not help himself.

Valerie came out in a few moments, and Stephen cried:

"Oh, you lovely——"

Ducie sickened at the sound of his voice, the soft, caressing, almost womanish note in it.

"Such a creature as that!" he thought. "And she doesn't know, she can't know. Even—she—she—she loves him!"

There! It was out! There could be no evading it any more. She loved—and she loved a creature who frequented low-down Jews and haunted cafés and crawled from studio to studio in search of food and drink and women. They had smelt

money and youth and innocence and would not be content until they had fed upon them and glutted themselves. . . . And Valerie, the wild, pure Valerie! She was walking away with them, with her hand on Stephen Lawrie's arm—Stephen Lawrie, the lucky man, as that sot had said on that appalling, yet, for Ducie, that great evening when he had cleared the whole lot out. . . . Why was not this man there then? He would have broken his neck.

A terrible suspicion seized Ducie that the fellow Lawrie would come back with Valerie and stay. Such people thought nothing of it. One woman was as good as another to them. If that happened, if Lawrie did, he would break his neck. Ducie now conceived it to be his duty to stay. To hell with the war! To hell with the army! He must save Valerie.

He crept back into the courtyard, waited for some time, and then slipped into the studio. He dared not switch on the light, but groped about in the darkness. Her bed in the bedroom had not been slept in. She had used the bed in the curtained recess.

Ducie's throat went dry. He understood. The whole place was prepared for two. All this was for Stephen, Stephen Lawrie who had made Valerie, the pure, the fair, the lovable, Valerie, the little queen, as the Kaffirs used to call her, his mistress! . . . Yes. Everything was for two.

"I can't go back," thought Ducie.

His eyes swam and round him floated the horrible

grinning faces of the men in camp, those who were jealous of and those who hated him because he would never share in their foul words or their foul living. He could have done but for her; he could have shared everything but for her; he could have been warm in the herd but for her—the little aristocrat who had taught him to despise the mob. . . . And now she had succumbed to the first swindler with a lying tongue who crossed her path.

Ducie tore at his throat to relieve the suffocation that overcame him. He could neither move forward nor backward. He stood leaning against the lintel of the door listening, waiting for her to come back. It was nearly twelve o'clock. He hoped she would not be too late. Too late for what? He knew but would not admit it to himself, although every few minutes the trains went rumbling by.

## §

VALERIE and her two friends went swinging up the road towards the Heath. They were all excited and full of the blissful pain of anticipation. Such great things they were going to do! Stephen was to be a writer and begin by writing about England for Mr. Perekatov's Moscow paper when it was revived; while Valerie was to be a sculptress and make portraits of both of them.

Very few of the houses were lit, and the streets were in darkness, and Valerie said:

"I want to push all the houses down. When I first came by England I could not make out how



people could know their own houses when they were all so alike."

"In my country," said Mr. Perekatov, "in weather like this we would be out in the forest sleeping until we became as full of sap as the earth. Yes! For weeks we would sleep out in the forest; not a few trees such as you have here, but hundreds of miles. Here there is nothing that you can get lost in, except the millions of people, and then if you do, there are policemen to see that you have a roof over your head."

"Try Scotland," said Stephen. "O Valerie! I am longing to take you to the mountains."

"Mountains!" she cried. "You haven't any. I have seen the Hex River Mountains and the Drakensberg and the Himalayas. . . ."

"And yet," said Mr. Perekatov, "there is nothing in the world so great as London. Nowhere where he who wishes it can be so much alone."

They had reached the darkness where the houses cease and the Heath begins. In front of them lay the pond, hardly distinguishable from the earth, and beyond that a dark blue expanse through which low hills loomed, stretching away embracing the huddled darkness of the outskirts whose presence could be divined rather than seen. The stars twinkled through a scarcely visible haze, and a thin moon drooped languidly as though it were hardly worth the trouble to appear. From the trees and from the greasy earth came a thick pungent scent which overpowered Valerie.

"I don't like it," she said. "It is too voluptuous."

"Very English," grunted Mr. Perekatov. "I am sorry you don't like it."

"Too soft," she said, and she stood shaking her hands with impatience. "Oh, so slow, so slow! It is hardly night already. You should see the night in my country, where in ten minutes after the sun has been scorching you it is so black that you cannot see your hand and so cold that you must wear your fur coat. I tell you, things happen in my country."

"It takes a hundred years for things to happen in this England," said Stephen, "but they do happen all the more thoroughly for that. Great eaters, great drinkers, great lovers, and good digestion. That man was not far wrong who said that London was the belly of the world."

"The sewage," said Mr. Perekatov solemnly, "is quite remarkable."

Stephen gave a shout of laughter and embraced his friend for that stroke of wit. Valerie had not followed it, because she had come to see Mr. Perekatov as the rock of wisdom upon whom her troubles might break. She turned to him and said:

"Everything begins to-morrow."

"Everything?"

"For us three. It is a new life."

"The surprise for me?" asked Stephen.

"I am talking to Perekatov. Will you please look at the moon?"

Stephen walked away obediently.

"Please," said Valerie, "I want you to come and see me in the morning. I want your help."

There is something I want cleared up before we begin."

"Your old trouble?" asked Mr. Perekatov.

"It is a trouble," she replied. "Will you?"

"Of course. Is there the lowest dog that I would not help?"

"Oh, you are wonderfully right, wonderfully strong!"

She was sure now that, meeting Mr. Perekatov, if only for a few minutes, Ducie could not but understand and be eager to share and to play his part in the new life they were going to make, a life in which incidental things like money and marriage and nationality and reputation would be so insignificant as to be not worth quarrelling about. . . . Yes. This would be the solution. Mr. Perekatov would remove the hysterical passion in poor Ducie in a few minutes.

She patted Mr. Perekatov's shoulder and said:

"Thank you."

Then, looking across at Stephen, she repeated her old request:

"You will always be his friend and look after him, when I am gone?"

"But you are not going? It is foolish to talk of going. If any one does not like what you are doing, let them go to hell."

"Hell means something to me," she said. "I have been through it. I would not send any one there."

"Oi—oi," growled Mr. Perekatov, "what has happened to you? You are grown-up,"



"Grown-down I think," said Valerie. "I want to laugh like Stephen."

"One is enough," replied Mr. Perekatov.

"Valerie!" called Stephen.

She ran over to him, and his arms went round her. He held her close.

"I was suddenly afraid," he said. "I don't know why. Suddenly cold with fear. Perhaps you left me for a moment. I don't know. I always feel it when anything takes your thought off me for a moment. . . . And then I am terrified, and fear that I may have hurt you by taking too much from you."

"Foolish!" she murmured. "Foolish! You have given me everything; all this lovely, lovely world. How could you take too much when I have everything."

"Oh, my love!"

Their lips came together. The wonder of love poured through them, unchecked, uncontrolled, drawing into itself all the magic of the night, of all the nights and all the days and all things living and that ever lived.

Together sobbingly, tremulously, they found one word:

"To-morrow."

## §

MR. PEREKATOV was in high spirits as they descended from the heights. He insisted on walking behind them like a footman, and made a little coachman's cape of his coat and pulled out

the crown of his hat to make it tall. Stephen and Valerie trod the air; they were borne on the silence of their joy, a silence more musical than any sound, a silence that no sound could ever break.

Behind them Mr. Perekatov hummed like a great bee. Though he had no ear for music he was trying to sing to himself—snatches of Russian songs, revolutionary hymns, the song of Russian soldiers going into battle. Suddenly they were astonished to hear him say in an enormous voice that rang through the streets:

“O God! You who have made me suffer can injure me no more.”

And turning they found him writhing on the ground, holding his face in his hands. Terrified at first, they found after a moment that he was convulsed with agonised laughter, all the more terrible that he could find no relief in tears. He waved them away and soon rose as astonished as they and very rueful. He brushed down his clothes and said:

“I never did a thing like that before. I thought something that I could not think.”

He looked in some alarm at Valerie as though she were somehow responsible, but he could make nothing of that and walked on muttering to himself. Every now and then he half stopped, but always went on again.

His house was nearer than the studio, and he would not go on. He bowed low to Valerie, his whole movement full of the involuntary obeisance he had made to Stephen in his rooms.

"Good-night," he said. "I will come to-morrow morning."

With extraordinary celerity he ran up the stone steps to his house and let himself in without looking back.

"He has frightened you," said Stephen.

"No; not he. . . . No. I'm not frightened. I'm—I'm sorry. I think we hurt him. . . . It was like—like the snapping of a rope I saw once on board ship."

"All the same it has frightened you. Shall I stay with you?"

They had reached the studio. Ducie, with every nerve at stretch, could hear them.

"Shall I stay with you?" said Stephen, with the damnable, tender, womanish caress in his voice.

"Not to-night. . . . I want everything to begin to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" thought the listener. "To begin to-morrow. I am to go out there; and they are to begin—feasting and loving and nestling together, while I am out there, I, who love her; I, who have watched over her, I am to go out there while they—while they——"

"Good-night, my love."

"Good-night, my love."

Oh, damnable liar! Thief! Stinkard! Corrupter of youth and innocence! While men were dying, while men were left to rot, while lovers left their dear ones, such thieves were abroad, alive, slyly rejoicing. All the passions, pent up, tortured, thwarted, baffled, choked in Ducie, burst into a torrential hatred of this Lawrie. He bounded to



the door, seized the handle, when suddenly his fury turned ice-cold. His brain was frozen into cunning, into an icy knowledge of what he must do. . . . Life was nothing. Life had become nothing in these days. Death was nothing either. Love was everything. The thief should lose his prey. . . . Oh, that was simple ! The thief should lose his prey.

How she loved ! How rotten she must be to love so miserable a thing ! The rottenness of women ! Hardly woman yet, what might she not do if she were to continue as she had begun ? . . . But she was of no account. It was Stephen Lawrie who must be dealt with, the damned, sly, wheedling thief who could make the soul aware of itself, its good and its evil, and see the evil leaping to destroy the good.

Ducie pawed with his hands up and down, up and down in the darkness. He must let the man go because life was nothing.

A train went rumbling by. Please God it might not be the last !

“ Good-night, my love.”

They embraced. Stephen walked away. Turned at the gate, the gate crashed. Valerie's hand was on the handle of the door. Ducie just had time to rush on tiptoe across the studio into the bedroom. He shut the door. There was no handle on the outside. She could not discover him. He sat on the bed, panting, and, because it relieved him, went on panting like a dog, but made no noise.

Valerie did not try to enter. He heard her part

the curtain of the recess; a faint noise every now and then, and at last silence.

He knew and prayed, but to no God, only to Valerie. He prayed for forgiveness of all his sins and for strength to go forward stainless into eternity, and he prayed that Stephen Lawrie might be damned eternally.

"You will sleep, my love," he whispered. "You will sleep and I shall sleep, and all this noise that is in the world, all this slyness and thieving and lust and treachery will thin away into a tiny breath. Yes, sleep."

So saying, he was filled with an extraordinary kindness, a well-being, a muffled love that padded all his senses, so that he lost all knowledge of where he was, save that he was with Valerie. He told himself that the war had stopped, that everything had stopped, and that she must sleep. She must sleep, but she must not show her face because no eyes but his must see it again. She had been blasphemed against, and therefore no one must see her face.

The faint light of the stars shone through the window. He put out his hand and seized a pillow from the bed, and he watched his hand curiously as though it were that of another man. Then very quietly he opened the door and crept into the studio, parted the curtains, stole in and knelt by the bed. He could just see her head and her hair streaming over the pillow. He could not see her face; no one must see her face. He covered it and pressed tenderly, tenderly with a convulsive power, feeling that if he used it too

long his brain must snap. He felt the life go out of her, and it pleased him, eased him, soothed him.

It pleased him. Life was nothing. Love was everything and love was dead. Valerie was not dead; she was his for ever—for ever and ever, Amen. . . . What was it they said before Amen? Oh yes!

“As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”

It seemed to him that he had been sitting there for ever, that he had been made so, like a rock, or a tree, or a waterfall, a thing that you could see as a child and then visit as an old man. He ran through all the stages of his being—childhood, boyhood, adolescence, manhood—and it was always just the same: a thing growing and looking at himself sitting there.

A train went rumbling by. Please God it might not be the last! He thought it must be the last, and whimpered a little, then told himself that it was nothing to cry about. Only he must make sure that it was not the last. That idea he fixed and was able to move on it. He began to smile; a smile that glowed with happiness. In his eagerness to make sure that it was not the last train he forgot all about closing the doors, and left them open, wide open, so that the air rushed in and made the curtains sway and rustle.

He bought himself a ticket for twopence, and asked the man at the wicket:

“Is there a train?”

“Due in now, sir.”

He ran down the stairs. There was not a soul



on the platform. There was only a flickering light. He hated the light, and looked up the tunnel. Ah, that was better! Life was like that, a long darkness. He stepped down on to the line and walked eagerly into the darkness. Ah, that was comforting! That was truth. . . . Hideous, hideous mockery! He was trapped again! There was another light coming towards him, a light that made a terrible roaring noise, growing louder and louder. So there was a light behind and a light before him. Of that behind he was afraid. Stumbling, tottering, swaying, he ran, ran, ran towards the light approaching him.

“Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, Good Lord.”

## §

MR. PEREKATOV woke up very much ashamed of himself. His clothes were in a terrible mess. What had he done? What extraordinary thing had happened to make him do a thing like that, to lie on the ground and laugh in such an indecent, such an animal way, like a drunken peasant? He got up feeling strangely different, almost young, no longer bound by his thoughts. The smell of the forest was in his nostrils, and when he looked out of the window he half expected to see his village in the Ukraine. Indeed, he half refused to accept, what his eyes told him, that this was London in war-time, because the lawyer who lived opposite and worked in the ambulance corps had just come back in his car.

"It is Russia," he thought; "or, it does not matter where it is, because it is always the same."

He smiled as he remembered his promise to Valerie, and, looking down at his dog, he said:

"Aw, she is a good one! Yes. She wants to be rid of her trouble. She is so young as that."

He dressed very carefully and took a larger supply of cigarettes in case the conversation should be long.

Being polite and modest, he knocked gently at the door of the studio, finding it wide open; but he received no answer. After knocking again he entered cautiously and stood horrified to hear a woman sobbing very, very quietly to herself. Thinking it was Valerie, he said to himself:

"Aw! Poor little blighter. It is a big trouble. She must know that I have feeling too, as well as thought."

He walked in the direction of the sobs and found Chris Atwell kneeling by the bed, with Valerie, cold, pale and golden, and young, so young, and very beautiful.

The woman sobbing had not heard him. He stole away. Only the vein swollen in his huge neck gave any sign of what he felt.

This was England, and the police must be told. He did that.

At the corner of the street he met Chinnery, and, knowing that he was on his way to pester Valerie, seized him by the arm and dragged him sternly to the corner, where he held him until a 'bus came. Not a word did he say; not a word did Chinnery

dare to say, for Mr. Perekatov's grip burned into the bone of his arm.

At Oxford Circus Mr. Perekatov descended, still holding Chinnery in an unrelenting grip. In the street he shook him, and in a voice of hatred, contempt, and despair that came from his deepest bowels, he said :

"Get home, you stench, to the stench."

Chinnery gulped twice, thrice, and then in sheer terror ran, threading eel-like through the crowd.

Mr. Perekatov walked slowly towards Stephen's rooms. Not far away he met Mlle. Donnat in tears. She accosted him :

"Oh, mon cher, M. Perekatov ! He is going. Tell me where he is going. I must know where he is going."

"He is not going," said Mr. Perekatov.

She, too, was afraid of him, and she edged away.

He found Stephen tying up his last bundle of books. Much of his furniture had already gone, but the bed was left. Mr. Perekatov sat on it, pulled out his cigarette-case and began to smoke. He went on smoking for a long time.

At last Stephen, who had stood perfectly still from the moment when his friend came in, said :

"Has anything happened ? I know something has happened. I knew last night that something had happened."

"She is dead."

"Yes."

"Some one has killed her. It is a shame. They have robbed her, and she was good."



“Will you go with me? Not now. Soon.”

Mr. Perekatov bowed:

“I promised her that I would always go with you,” he said.

Stephen stood by his window looking out towards the synagogue. This was London. Oh yes! There were some children playing and a dog trying to attract attention. He stood for a long time until he saw nothing, only Valerie under the stars with him in the wonder of love and their lips kissing the word: To-morrow.

And this was that To-morrow!

Turning, he saw Mr. Perekatov's back bowed and huddled.

“Perekatov,” he said, “the glasses are broke!”

Mr. Perekatov made no response.

“Perekatov,” Stephen called again, “you will have to grow a beard and become a prophet.”

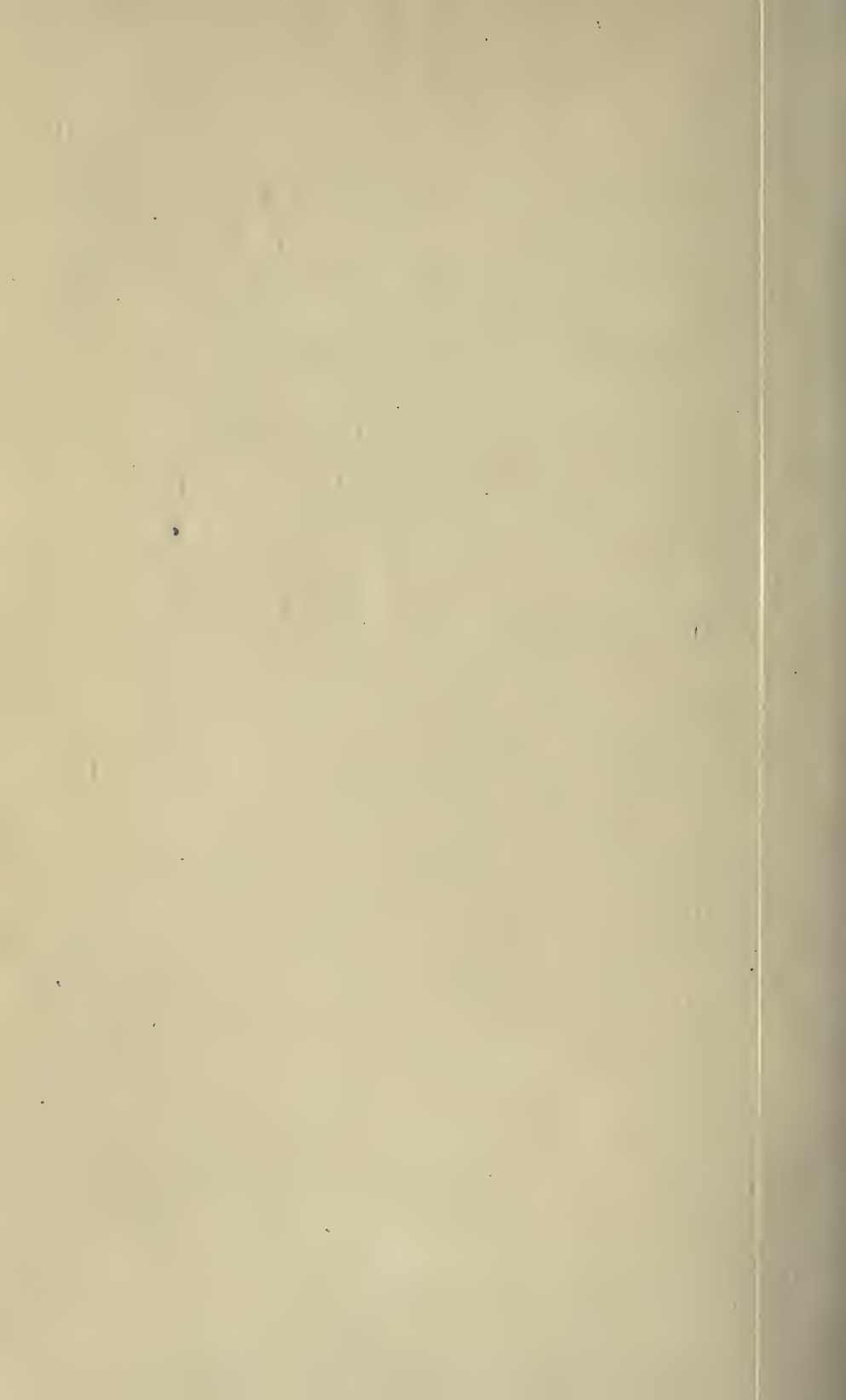
Mr. Perekatov groaned:

“Aw! Don't! . . . Don't joke!”

A clear flame of anger burned through Stephen, making his face into a countenance of stone and his mouth to open like the mouth of a tragic mask, and he said:

“When beauty is murdered and youth is done to death, the time of prophecy is fully come.”

THE END



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